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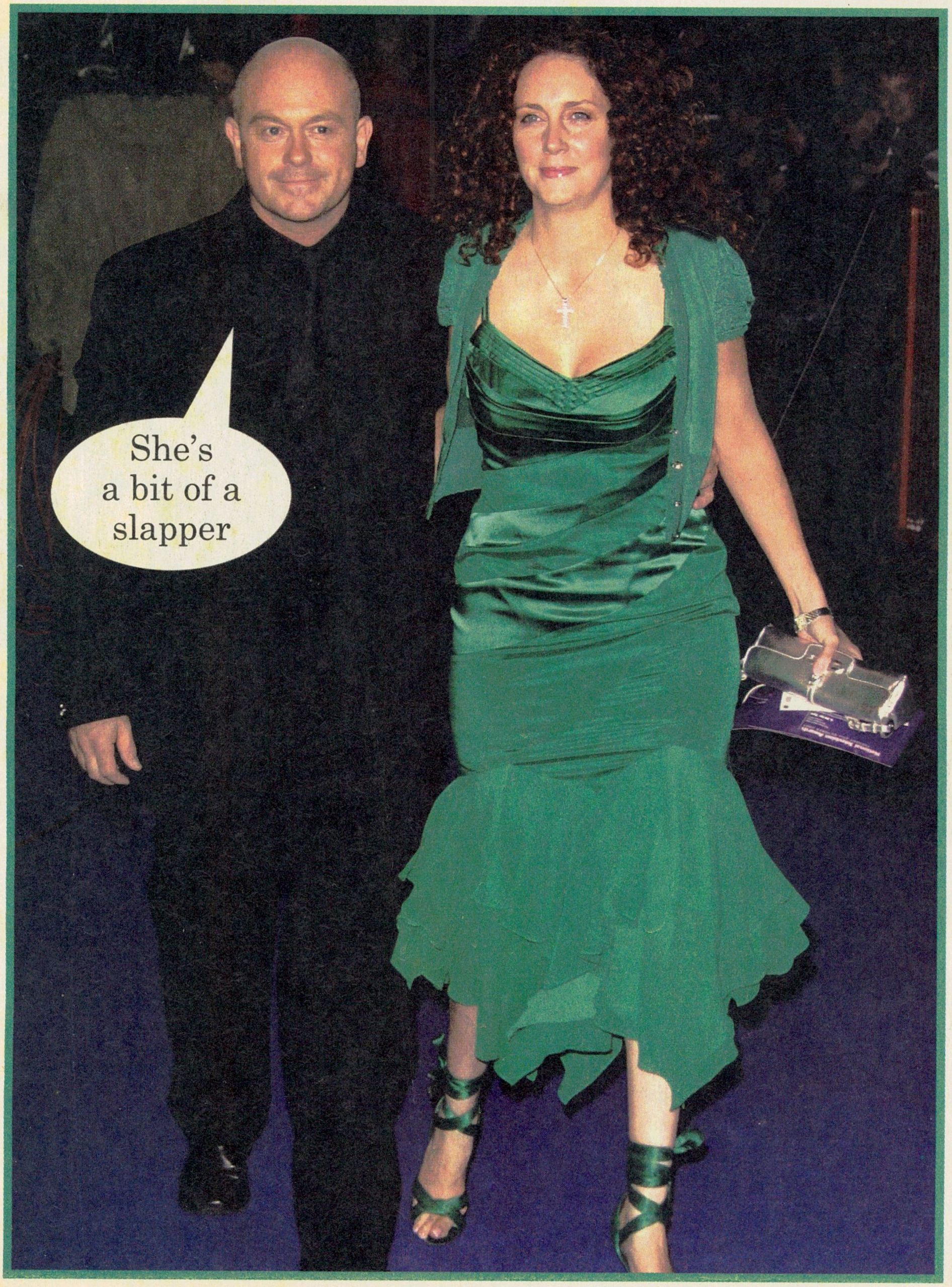
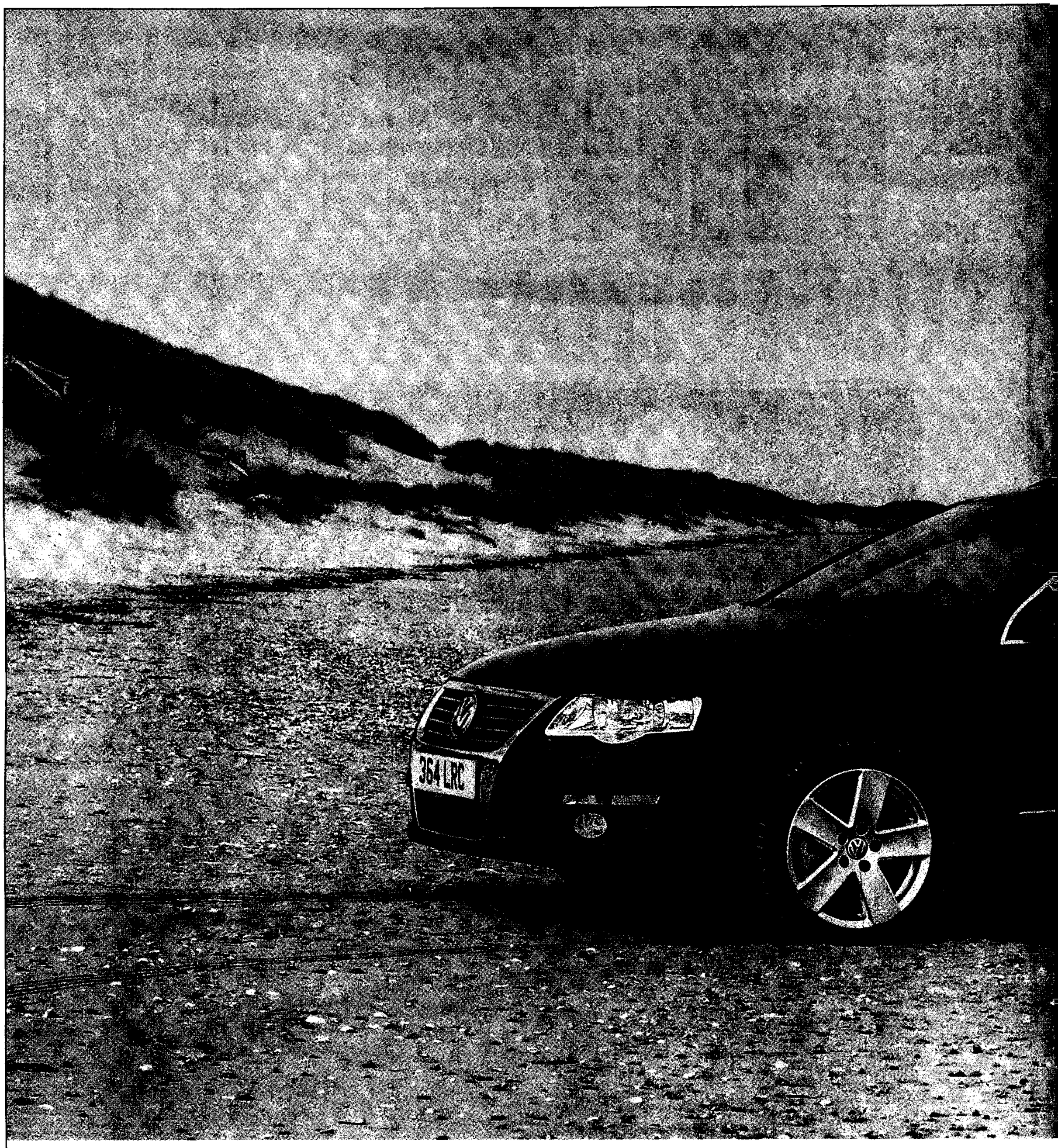
PRIVATE EYE

SUN EDITOR ARRESTED





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ban 37.7 (7.5) – 21.7 (13.0); extra urban 56.5 (5.0) – 40.4 (7.0); combined 47.9 (5.9) – 30.7 (9.2). CO_2 emissions 159 – 221g/km.

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THE NEW

SUNDAY GNOMEGRAPH

BY EDITOR SARAH STROBES

INTELLIGENT, elegant, classy, relaxed... but enough of me! In today's world few of us have time to read newspapers, or indeed to write them.

That's why the new-look *Sunday Gnomegraph* has adopted an innovative "thin" format so that it doesn't contain loads of half-baked frothy articles designed to fill up the pages... like this one! For me, a Sunday newspaper is like a bath bubble, floating in the air, smelling of perfume, with a picture of a woman in her knickers on the front page. And, just like a bath bubble, it should leave you transformed, fragrant, news-based and waspish.

That's why you'll love our new magazine, "Nutella" – it's creamy, chocolatey and easy to spread on your bread. Not to mention focusing on core news values around the world.

In short, my dream is that the *Sunday Gnomegraph* is like an iPod – full of old rubbish that you don't want to listen to. *(Is this right? Brillo.)*

Sarah Strobes

In this week's Nutella

Pants: In or Out? by Matthew D'Ancona
Shoes: the new socks? by Chris Booker
How to open a tin of soup by Niall Ferguson
Top Ten Hats by Simon Heffer
***PLUS* Nothing else**
***PLUS* Free DVD of terrible old film that's on Sky this evening anyway.**

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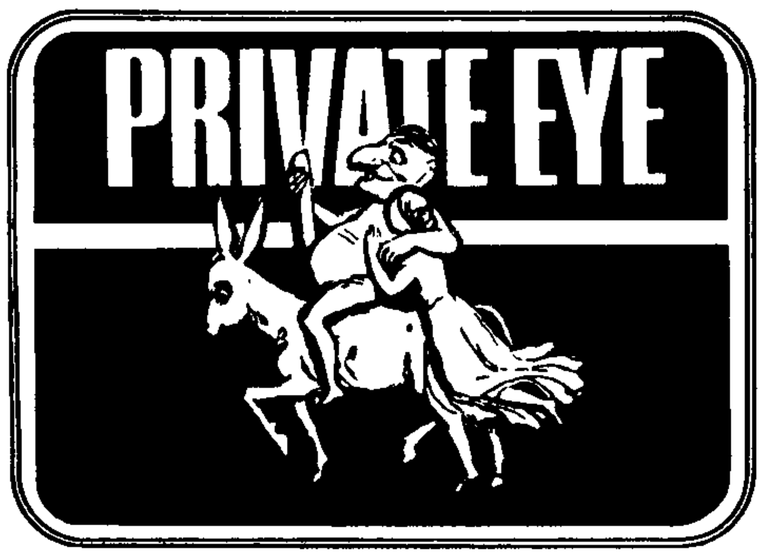


With added punch

■ **Blunkett: A question of trust laws** 6
■ **Hutton report: The new boy at pensions** 8
■ **Money for old rape: classics on TV** 10
■ **No angel, that Gabriel: Books** 26
■ **Forging ahead... the Niger uranium story that won't lie down: In the Back** 27-29

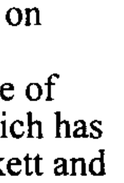
ON TUESDAY last week, the day before David Blunkett resigned, the first two pages of the *Times* were dominated by what appeared to be a corking scoop.

"The *Times* has learnt that seven weeks before taking up his job with DNA Bioscience Mr Blunkett was told that he had breached the ministerial code of conduct," it revealed, "by failing to consult the advisory committee on business appointments over an earlier appointment." It quoted from an exchange of correspondence in March this year – "which has been seen by the *Times*" – between Blunkett and the committee chairman Lord Mayhew.

How did the paper learn this? Perhaps by reading the *Eye*. Back in March (*Eye* 1128) we reported that Blunkett had accepted a consultancy with Indepen management consultants only one month after his last resignation, despite the advisory committee's clear guidelines that "a three-month waiting period from the date of leaving office will normally be expected when the former minister is of cabinet rank". Asked why he hadn't consulted the committee, Blunkett told the *Eye*: "I understood it's optional."

Not so, as the committee itself made clear soon afterwards by sending the *Eye* its letters to Blunkett which showed that he had breached the ministerial code (*Eye* 1134) – the selfsame correspondence which turned up, many months later, in last week's *Times* "exclusive".

Curse Of Gnome



WHEN *Private Eye* first approached Blunkett about his failure to consult the advisory committee back in April, he said: "The *Mail on Sunday* already had this story – I thought *Private Eye* were supposed to be ahead of the game not behind it."

The *Mail* had indeed reported his employment with Indepen Business Consultants, but not his failure to apply to the advisory committee for clearance. Seven months later it is this failure that led to his fall.

BLUNKETT MEMORIAL ISSUE

WHY DID David Blunkett continue to take extra-curricular jobs without consulting the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments – even after he had apologised for his previous breach of the rules?

Most pundits assume that he was distracted by the social whirl of nights at Annabel's and days spent with paternity lawyers. However, the real blame lies with Tony Blair, who encouraged Blunkett's recklessness by not reprimanding him in the slightest for his failure to consult the committee, even though only the prime minister has the power to enforce the ministerial code of conduct.

Over the past two years Blair has repeatedly shown his contempt for the committee. Last summer (*Eye* 1112) we reported the case of Air Chief Marshal Sir John Day, who wanted to move straight from the RAF to work as military adviser to BAE Systems, one of the RAF's main suppliers. Following "normal propriety principles", the committee recommended a one-year gap between Sir John's retirement from Whitehall and the start of his new job, pointing out that he "was involved with air force board decisions that would have a direct bearing on the MoD's business with the company". But the Dear Leader thought otherwise and overruled the committee, insisting there was "a wider national interest" in letting the air chief marshal cash in as soon as possible.

Sir John was soon joined by a throng of other top brass whizzing through the revolving door. In its 2004 report, the committee suggested that the numbers of public servants seeking employment in the private sector "are so significant as to amount to a 'traffic' from the department to the... contractors who supply it". It feared that civil servants – or ministers, presumably – might be influenced by "a hope or expectation of post-retirement employment with the companies with which they were dealing officially".

Blair, however, thinks that this "traffic" is wholly desirable, and shouldn't be impeded by speed-bumps or roadside cameras. Irritated beyond endurance by the committee's "propriety principles", last year he asked Sir Patrick Brown to review the rules governing business appointments – "to ensure that they are compatible with a public service that is keen to encourage greater interchange with the private and other sectors which is essential for effective delivery in today's public service".

With those terms of reference, there were no prizes for guessing what Blair wanted: more and faster traffic. And Sir Patrick was sure to oblige – as a former Whitehall mandarin who helped privatise the bus, rail and water services before joining the board of the Go Ahead Group (a bus and rail operator) and Northumbrian Water.

Brown's report, which he delivered to the Cabinet Office several months ago, was due to be published at the end of October. But publication has been delayed. Even Blair apparently feels it would look a bit iffy to announce a further relaxation in the already minimal anti-sleaze rules *quite* so soon after Blunkett's departure. If the scandal now obliges him to retain or strengthen the present system, the PM can expect plenty of scrutiny from his old sparring partners at the advisory committee when he himself eventually launches his own post-ministerial corporate career.

NEWS

TRUST law specialists were bemused by David Blunkett's bid to save his ministerial job by announcing that he would be selling the shares in DNA Biosciences he had acquired for £15,000 and placed in a trust for his sons. No public document has yet been filed detailing the shares purchase, the name in which they are held or the trustees.

As the presumed settlor of the trust, Blunkett would have no right to demand the shares be sold. That would have to be a decision for the unnamed independent trustees acting in the best interests of the beneficiaries – the sons. And if the company were to be floated on the stock market and the shares provide the six-figure killing the greedy Blunkett was anticipating when he bought, then a sale could not possibly have been in the beneficiaries' best interests.

And if the trustees simply did what Blunkett said, the taxman might assume that the shares were really Blunkett's and not his sons after all and any profit on sale be taxed accordingly. If the sons directed the trustees to do what Dad wanted, the same could apply.

But maybe like many a politician in a hole, Blunkett just made a sufficient-unto-the-day statement designed to prevent an enforced resignation hoping that after the storm had passed he could say that sadly the shares could not be sold because the trustees refused to do so. But of course that was not his fault and the profit from future government business was also nothing to do with him.

Now of course no sale will be necessary, so it will be interesting to see what, if any, decision is taken by the trustees about the future ownership of the DNA shares.

Number crunching

£15,000

■ Value of shares David Blunkett claims he purchased "to safeguard his sons' inheritance"

£215,000

■ Minimum income of David Blunkett in past year (while living rent free)

THE National Lottery Commission publishes its "statement of main principles" this week, setting out how it will judge bids in the competition for the right to run the UK's national gamble.

Last time the commission lost in the high court after trying to exclude Camelot, to whom it later gave the licence. It messed up so badly that this time it has poached Robert Foster, former chief executive of the Competition Commission. If anybody knows how to sort out a competition it ought to be him, right?

He hasn't made a terribly good start. Last time the commission made much of requiring Camelot to have a strategy to promote lottery games run (or jointly run) by other firms. Five years later, this is the provision of which the commission's website "breaches" page says, "following an investigation... it became apparent that [Camelot] was failing to maintain or implement a strategy to encourage potential applicants... as was required." That would explain why there have been no independent games. So what action has the commission taken?

"It was concluded that the licensee was in breach and this was recorded in December 2004." Er, none then! No doubt any putative bidders for the next lottery licence, if not put off from bidding altogether by this, will ultimately hope to benefit from the same beady eye.

Street of Shame

MAX CLIFFORD has strongly denied having anything to do with the extraordinary coincidence of the actor who plays Phil Mitchell being attacked by his ex-girlfriend just hours after *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade was arrested after a violent row with her husband Ross Kemp who plays Mitchell brother Grant. But his hand was very much in evidence in one effort to downplay the scrap on behalf of his friend.

"Kerry Makes Hit Up! Pop Babe laughs off punch-up" was the headline over a full page of pictures in Monday's *Sun* of Clifford client Kerry Katona obligingly staging a mock fight with her boyfriend in their front garden.

"The *Sun* revealed on Saturday how Kerry had slapped 26-year-old Dave after a boozy bust-up in a Spanish lapdancing bar. And yesterday it was reported the pair had split amid claims that he hit HER in the same venue, knocking her unconscious," the paper pointed out. "To show their rocky romance is still ON they shared a cuddle and a kiss... before assuring onlookers their relationship was 'fine'."

How many more Z-listers will have to hit and make up before *Sun* readers are convinced that domestic violence is just a bit of fun?

LAST Wednesday's *Daily Mail* had a two-page feature by Lucy Cavendish on the paper's favourite subject: why women shouldn't go out to work.

"Staying at home – or even saying you want to stay at home – is breaking the last taboo," she claimed. "But I am not the only woman who secretly likes baking an apple pie." Cavendish looked pretty smug in the accompanying photo, posing with her three sons. As well she might: "The children are happier. My partner is happier. The dog is happier and I am happier... It's so much more relaxing than working."

All of which must have surprised any *Mail* readers in London who bought the *Evening Standard* the very same day and noticed a column by Lucy Cavendish about, er, the joys of going to the office.

"There is something very relaxing about getting on a train and leaving everyone at home squabbling," she wrote. "I have come back from holiday in Spain to scenes of chaos... But of course I can escape all this by going back to work."

A SURPRISE guest turned up at 10 Downing Street last week for the party hosted by Tony Blair to thank everyone involved in London's Olympic bid: one Mike Anderson, who identified himself as the representative of the London *Evening Standard*.

As *Eye* readers will know, Anderson actually left the *Evening Standard* some weeks ago – under a large cloud. He now works for Rupert Murdoch. An inquiry is underway at the *Standard* to discover how the old rascal snaffled the paper's sole invitation.

ANOTHER victory for *News of the World* fake sheikh Mazher Mahmood, who, for one reason or another, is seeing an increasing number of his scoops resulting in police investigations these days.

On 23 October, just days after it was revealed that police were taking seriously deported asylum-seeker Florim Gashi's claims that he had fabricated the evidence which was the basis for more than a dozen *News of the World* scoops, including the infamous "Posh Spice Kidnap" of 2002, the paper had another hot exclusive.

Imran Patel, "a fanatic who has had arms training in Pakistan", told Mahmood that he had been "groomed" to be a fifth suicide bomber in London on 7 July before getting cold feet and pulling out.

As is the usual routine, "the *News of the World* handed its dossier on Patel to the Anti-Terrorist Squad", who obligingly arrested him late on the Saturday evening just prior to the *Screws* going to press – before questioning him at length and, rather less obligingly, charging him with wasting police time.

So how did the paper deal with this fascinating post-script to its tale the following Sunday? Did it reassure readers that there was in fact no need to worry about the dire warnings of primed fanatics in their midst it had spread over 1,000 words the week before? Er, it did not print another word on the matter.

SOUTHWARK Crown Court heard last week that Piers "Morgan" Moron bought £67,000 worth of shares in Viglen on 17 January 2000, the day before the shares were tipped in his paper's City Slickers column.

Previous accounts of the story – including the Press Complaints Commission report in May 2000 – have accepted Moron's claim that he bought a mere £20,000 worth of Viglen shares, and then gave the profits to charity. Shome mishtake?

ONE of the easiest decisions for the Press Complaints Commission this year must have been ruling that the *Evening Standard's* supposed exposé of the "terror and hatred for sale just yards from Baker Street" was dangerously misleading.

Staff at the bookshop named and pictured in the piece were abused and threatened with violence after the report "led people to believe that the shop sought to promote and incite terrorism".

The *Standard* printed a photograph of the respectable, long-established Dar Al Taqwa bookshop near Baker Street, alongside a picture of extremist pro-terrorism books, none of which had ever been sold at Dar Al Taqwa (see *Eye* 1142).

The PCC ruled that the *Standard* had not taken sufficient care over the accuracy of the piece (ie it was completely incorrect), which was published at a "sensitive time" soon after the London bombings.

POOR Hermione Granger. As Emma Watson, the actress who plays her in the series of Harry Potter films, approaches the age of consent, Wapping's enthusiasm for her as a pin-up appears to be waning.

The *Times*, which speculated lasciviously on its front page over the potential for her love life when she was 12 (see *Eye* 1076), made do with a relatively modest picture of her at last weekend's premiere on page 8, accompanied only by the mildly disturbing comment that she was wearing "a grown-up dress".

The ardour of the *Sun* also appears to have cooled. Despite salivating over the prospect of Watson's "romantic scenes" in the new film two years ago (at the very time the paper was waging a battle on "child sex pervs"), her appearance on the red carpet this time was relegated down page in favour of a snap of Pixie Geldof, 15, who apparently wowed the crowd by looking "sultry".

"I AM proud of the free press we have in this country," announced David Blunkett at the press conference following his resignation.

"I believe it is very important and I think that the scrutiny of public office is crucial. Unless we recognise that private and public are separate we will destroy democracy in Britain."

And indeed, that very morning's newspapers carried a prime example of the shameless intrusion into Blunkett's private life that he so decries: a large piece in the *Times* by Andrew Pierce detailing once again his (irrelevant) paternity battle with Kimberly Quinn and how he was "backed all the way to court by his loyal sons", on whose behalf he had apparently taken up the notorious post with DNA Bioscience.

"They were supportive of his wish to establish legally that he was William's father," an enthusiastic source informed Pierce. "There is a filial link. They knew that William was their brother… His sons were supportive because they have such a tremendous relationship with their dad. Blunkett is not rich. His family had no money. This would have been a huge strain on his finances. There were half a dozen court cases. He would want to do right by his sons."

Who supplied Pierce with this shameless intrusion into the privacy of the politician's family? A "friend of David Blunkett", which, as any hack who has ever picked up the phone to a cabinet minister knows, is code for the man himself.

JUST FANCY THAT!

Cover Image: Pop star Rachel Stevens in a red satin dress, alongside several other female celebrities.

Headline: "We LOVE Our Curvy Bodies"

– Heat magazine, 26.10.05

Cover Image: Pop star Rachel Stevens in a red satin dress, alongside several other female celebrities

Headline: "Celebrities Who HATE Their Bodies"

– New! Magazine, 26.10.05

OUR OLD friend Dr Raj Persaud is in deep doo-doo following the revelation that a commentary he wrote for the journal *Progress in Neurology & Psychiatry*, published in March this year, was largely cut-and-pasted from online articles by Professor Thomas Blass of the University of Maryland. The magazine has officially retracted Dr Raj's piece, adding that it "sincerely regrets what occurred".

Kleptomania is indeed a regrettable condition. Perhaps Dr Raj should see a shrink about it. Or maybe he should re-read another of his contributions to *Progress in Neurology & Psychiatry*, which appeared last year under the headline: "Peer review – a vital test of credibility".

"One of the criticisms of peer review is that ideas can be copied through the privilege of reading papers before they are published," he noted. "Electronic publishing is dramatically reducing the time between acceptance and publication online, and greater openness of the review process and ownership of views will further help to minimise plagiarism."

Shome mishtake, shurely?

THE *Daily Mail* managed to fill an entire double-page spread on 1 November with 60 pictures of female newsreaders, demonstrating that many of them had grown older or even had haircuts during the last four decades.

On closer inspection, however, some of the changes appeared to have been even more profound. For in 2001 – and for one year only – BBC Breakfast presenter Moira Stuart apparently turned into Dame Shirley Bassey.

SMACKWATCH

UNDER the leadership of Rebekah Wade, the *Sun* has always taken a hard line on all forms of anti-social behaviour.

Domestic Violence

"Today the *Sun* begins a new crusade to rid Britain of the scourge of violence in the home," the paper announced in January 2004. "Refuge boss Sandra Horley has this message for *Sun* readers: 'Call the police if a neighbour screams, encourage abused women to ring Refuge, write to your MP and teach children that violence is unacceptable'."

There can be no exceptions: for as the paper itself commented that February: "Violence in the home is a crisis that must always be addressed. If it goes unchecked, a vicious circle begins that can all too easily end in tragedy."

More recently, this admirable campaign shifted its focus. "The *Sun*'s campaign against domestic violence shocked many readers – and struck a chord with those who have been abused," the paper revealed on 28 September. "And it's not only women who are suffering – men pointed out that they have been victims too."

This was a point of which some of the paper's staff were already all too aware. "Why are women allowed to beat up men?" demanded *Sun* columnist Jane Moore on 8 June, following an attack on George Best by his female partner. "A bizarre assumption inflicts our society that when a man hits a woman it's wrong, but when she dishes out the blows its somehow less of a crime. It isn't, and it shouldn't be treated as such. Violently unhinged behaviour isn't exclusive to the male species… considering the law's promise to take domestic violence matters a lot more seriously, it's a disgrace that his attacker has got off scot-free."

And there can be no excuses. When TV presenter Frank Partridge was convicted for punching his girlfriend in the face in April 2004, the paper was scornful of his defence that the incident was merely "a domestic argument which got out of hand". "SHAME ON YOU", the *Sun* thundered, denouncing him in its editorial as an "arrogant brute" whose excuses were "beyond contempt". By contrast, Rebekah's own fracas last week – to which police were called by neighbours concerned by the noises emanating from her flat – was, she told her readers, "just a silly row which got out of hand".

One section of the paper, however, seemed unwilling to go along with the *Sun*'s "fuss about nothing" editorial line. On Friday agony aunt "Dear" Deidre Sanders decided it was the ideal day to address the concerns of one correspondent in particular: "**I Love My Brutal Ex**: My wife was so violent I divorced her… it all blew up again at the weekend when she came round and assaulted me and one of the boys. The police were called and she was taken away… Will I ever feel happy again?" Deidre's advice? "No one deserves to be a punch-bag for anyone and it's very important your boys don't feel violence is the right answer. You acted as you did for the right reasons." Are you listening, Ross?

Binge Drinking

"A fifth of men and one in ten women are drinking nearly three times their daily recommended amount at least once a week," revealed a new columnist exclusively in the *Sun* in September last year.

"There is no excuse for binge-drinking. I'm not being a killjoy: I enjoy a drink and I want others to do so as well. But we must tackle those who go beyond decent behaviour and ruin society for the rest of us." Wise words – but who was the author? None other than the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, in whose company Rebekah Wade began her drinking session last Wednesday night which culminated in her arrest and a morning spent sleeping it off in the cells at Wandsworth police station.

She can't say she wasn't warned. "The new pub licensing system due in November will NOT usher in a new age of polite, Continental-style drinking," cautioned the *Sun* on 11 August. "Binge-drinking in late-night clubs will continue as much as before… Police, judges and medical experts warn of more violence."

Their readers appeared to agree. "Late Drink? No Thanks!" the paper bellowed on 3 September, announcing that 93 percent of its readers thought that extended drinking hours were "bad for Britain". "Drunken yobs already blight every major city and town in the country. WE SAY: BAR IT." The same day's editorial also questioned whether Louise Casey was fit to serve as Tony Blair's "respect tsar." "She is the government adviser who praised binge drinking, threatened to 'deck' Downing Street officials and boasted how she like to get 'hammered'," the paper sniffed. "Well, they do say poachers make the best gamekeepers."

Rebekah Wade and Ross Kemp left their friend Matthew Freud's birthday party just after 3am last Thursday morning, with fellow guests describing them as "absolutely legless."

Law and Order

"Lord Woolf, the outgoing Lord Chief Justice, has finally lost his marbles," gasped the *Sun* on 18 September.

"In his Lordship's bizarre view, the yobs, drunks and vandals who make our lives a misery should usually be spared the cells… Yet again, our most senior judge ignores *Sun* readers and Parliament. Jail is not just punishment. It keeps vermin off the streets." No doubt words that the arresting officers had in mind last Thursday morning, when they dragged Ms Wade off to spend eight hours in the cells.

THE perils of listening to financial PR men – always an occupational hazard for business hacks on Sunday papers – have been vividly demonstrated by the *Sunday Times*'s Paul Durman.

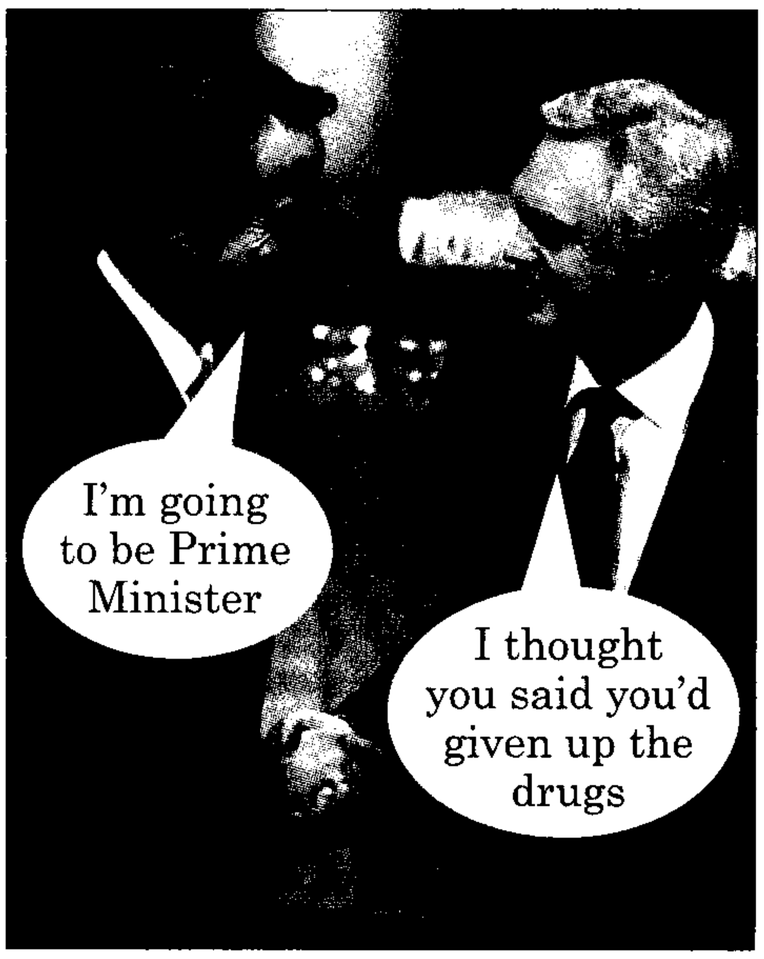
On 30 October he wrote a long piece about the mobile phone company O2. "After years of being seen as acquisition fodder, Peter Erskine's company is able to look for deals of its own," he declared. Although some observers still expected O2 to be swallowed by a bigger group, "Erskine's record suggests that may not be the way to bet."

First thing next morning, O2 announced that it was recommending acceptance of a £17.7bn takeover bid from Spanish telecoms giant Telefonica.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"David Blunkett should have consulted a watchdog before taking up the appointment on the board."

– Radio 5 Live.



WHILE all eyes were on David Blunkett's business interests, another Labour politician's onward march into the corporate world went unnoticed. On 28 October, P&O announced the appointment of Baroness Symons as a non-executive director.

Having spent most of her working life as an official in a civil service union, she may not seem particularly qualified for the cut-and-thrust of a FTSE-100 company. However, she is also a "new" Labour insider with excellent contacts in high places.

In May this year she became a director of British Airways, a mere *eight days* after standing down as a Foreign Office minister and deputy leader of the House of Lords. For 15 days' work a year, BA gives her £35,000 plus unlimited first-class flights for herself and her husband Phil Bassett (who, by happy coincidence, works at 10 Downing Street).

As international trade minister, Symons's responsibilities included promoting British airlines. Wearing her ministerial hat, she flew to Havana a few years ago and persuaded Fidel Castro's government to let BA open a regular service to Cuba. More recently, in 2002, she spoke at the launch of BA's £5.3m advertising campaign aimed at business travellers. No wonder the airline thinks so highly of her.

As, clearly, does P&O. Will she be lobbying her pals in government on the company's behalf? She certainly has form. In May 2003 the *Observer* ran a story claiming that Tessa Jowell's businessman husband David Mills had asked Symons for help in pushing through a $200m deal to supply Iran with BAe jets. Symons flatly denied offering him any special treatment. But in January 2005 the *Observer* obtained the letter which she had sent Mills, advising him on how best to side-step the US trade embargo against Iran.

"You will need to think very carefully about a lobbying strategy calibrated to achieve the right result," she advised, adding that she was "pleased" a meeting had been set up between a BAe director and the British embassy in Washington to discuss the problem. "If after that meeting you need further advice or help from me, please let me know. Yours sincerely, Liz."

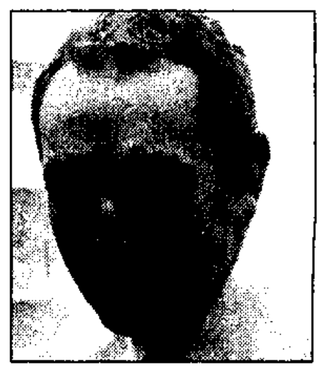
A month after publication of this letter, Symons announced that she would leave her ministerial post after the May election. And what a profitable decision that turned out to be!

THE government's determination to bring market forces to bear on criminal justice is likely to meet opposition just as fierce as that leveled at its NHS and education reforms.

The decision to sell off the probation service, for example, will create the ludicrous situation where private security companies will be writing the court reports that recommend jail sentences from which they could benefit because they also happen to run the jails. There will be little incentive for private companies to ensure that community or any other type of sentence works because at all levels private companies will benefit from having more offenders go through the criminal justice system.

It also seems those companies will come under less scrutiny. Last week it was reported that a young offenders unit had refused to allow in inspectors. Meanwhile, ministers at the Home Office recently refused to answer parliamentary questions tabled on behalf of Napo, the probation officers' union, which wanted to know how many private firms had been fined for failing to meet standards in jails or in electronic monitoring in the community. The excuse? That old favourite, "commercial confidentiality".

DAVID BLUNKETT's departure hasn't diminished Tony Blair's enthusiasm for heavy petting between ministers and the private sector – as the PM emphasised by replacing Blunkett with John Hutton MP.



MAN IN THE EYE

JOHN HUTTON

While in opposition, in the mid 1990s, Hutton continually harried the Major government over the many contracts it was dishing out to EDS, the Texas-based computer giant. "EDS has a gun to the government's head," he thundered, adding that consultancy payments to the company "enraged" him.

After the 1997 election, however, he went entirely silent on the subject – hardly surprising, given that EDS continued to pick up lucrative work from the government much as before. Instead, as an unswervingly loyal "new" Labour minister in the Department of Health, he learned to love big business's warm embrace.

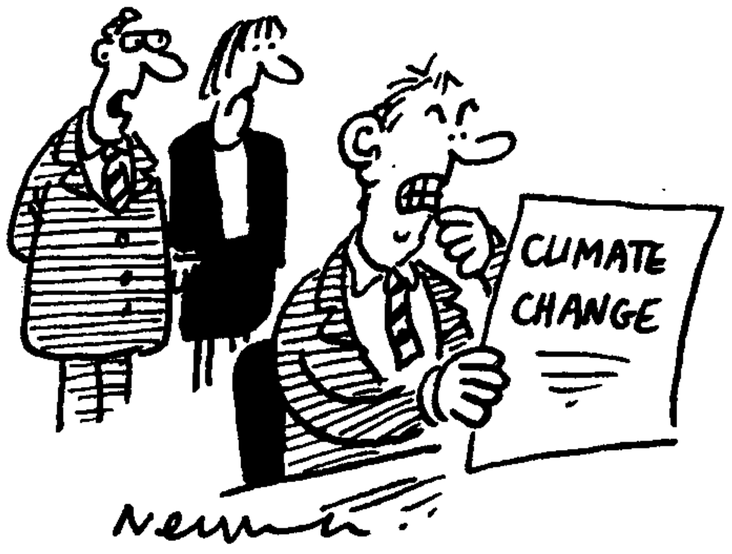
At the party conference in 2000, his main fringe speech was sponsored by Eli Lilly, the Prozac people. The following year one of his events was sponsored by Pfizer, the makers of Viagra, while another drug giant, Roche, booked him to talk on "Delivering radical solutions in the NHS: Exploring partnerships in healthcare" – a long-winded way of describing privatisation.

At the 2002 conference he was the main speaker at a meeting organised by the Adam Smith Institute and paid for by the big private-health provider PPP. At last year's conference he addressed the topic "Can the private sector deliver public good for the NHS?" – a question that answered itself, since the event was sponsored by Swedish health firm Capio, which had just won a £210m contract to carry out operations for the NHS.

By then Hutton had also shown his Blairite fervour for transferring NHS duties to the public sector by awarding a £95m contract for MRI scans to Alliance Medical Ltd. He boasted that the deal would prove "good value for money". Not so. Most of the scan images were sent abroad for analysis – leading to delays, language misunderstandings and misdiagnoses. There were so many complaints about the quality of work that, as revealed in *Eye* 1139, scans carried out by Alliance Medical had to be double-checked by NHS radiologists, thus placing an *extra* burden on the health service's time and resources. Commenting on the Alliance deal earlier this year, the head of the British Medical Association's radiology sub-committee said: "I think everyone acknowledges that it has been a complete disaster."

But it certainly provided good value for Alliance and its parent company Bridgepoint Capital – which, by an eerie coincidence, was employing former health secretary Alan Milburn as a £30,000-a-year consultant at the time Hutton awarded the contract. By an even stranger coincidence, Milburn was not merely Hutton's old boss but also his former flatmate and the best man at his wedding.

As a junior minister under Milburn, Hutton was known to Whitehall officials as his "Mini-Me". Now, at last, he himself can be Dr Evil.



"He's blowing hot and cold"

SUSPICION that the top jobs at the Financial Services Authority (FSA) are simply staging posts in the lucrative careers of bankers and lawyers grows as the FSA's head of enforcement becomes a partner in city law firm Herbert Smith, almost certainly on a salary of several hundreds of thousands of pounds.

In his four years at the FSA David Mayhew was responsible for taking on banks and other firms breaching regulations and worked on inquiries into Shell's overstated reserves and the ongoing investigation into the role of former chairman Sir Philip Watts, who happens to be a client of, er, Herbert Smith.

The firm's head of litigation candidly admitted that Mayhew's "deep understanding of the FSA" together with his private sector experience would be "very attractive to clients", neatly explaining how a short stint in the public sector can enhance someone's marketability and why ambitious professionals might not want to rock the boat too much while they're doing their temporary public service.

The Japanese have a word for regulators going to work for those they have been supervising: "amakudari", literally meaning "descent from heaven". So lawyers do go to heaven after all – but only to cash in on their celestial experience afterwards.

Number crunching

24 hours ■ Period terrorism suspects in Australia (al-Qaeda death toll: 88) can be detained before criminal charges must be levelled

5 days ■ Period terrorism suspects in Spain (al-Qaeda death toll: 191) can be detained before criminal charges must be levelled

7 days ■ Period terrorism suspects in USA (al-Qaeda death toll: 3,000) can be detained before criminal charges must be levelled

90 days ■ Period government proposes terrorist suspects in UK (al-Qaeda death toll: 52) should be allowed to be detained before criminal charges must be levelled

NO WONDER the idea of banning alcohol on public transport was so quickly retrenched, with so many MPs regularly making long journeys by train between London and their constituencies, and all in need of a little refreshment on the way.

Among them is Home Secretary Charles Clarke – a regular patron of the buffet car on the Norwich train, and by no means averse to a glass of wine as he travels.

EDUCASHUN SPECIAL

EDUCATION Secretary Ruth Kelly's decision that the Oratory School's admissions interview is "clear, objective and fair" was an opinion not shared by many in the education world.

Two people who certainly didn't agree were the experts from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, whose detailed report to the Department for Education and Skills earlier this year concluded that the system of interviewing families to check up on their faith and involvement in the Catholic church was "unclear, subjective and unfair".

They gave their advice in August after they were called in by a primary school in Hammersmith (the borough in which the Oratory School is located) that objected to the use of interviews, since the national Code of Practice on School Admissions says very clearly that "no parents or children should be interviewed".

Governors at the school attended by the Blair children (Kathryn Blair is currently in the mixed sixth form at the school previously attended by her older brothers) therefore had to fall back on the Blunkett-like excuse that while they "must have regard to the code", they don't always have to obey it.

Apparently, however, that excuse washes with Kelly. The adjudicators referred the case to her for determination (as they have to in cases relating to religion) and last month she decided the Oratory had provided "substantial evidence to support its case" and gave the school permission to continue interviewing.

GOVERNMENT plans to give parents more freedom to decide who runs their children's schools will mean a field day for private education companies.

One already eying up the opportunities is Global Education Management Systems (GEMS), owned and run by Dubai multi-millionaire Sunny Varkey. As well as a string of private schools around the world, including 13 in England, the firm already has significant work in the state sector after it bought the company that runs the Bexley Business academy and two other schools in Surrey.

GEMS' prospects are bolstered by a number of luminaries from the world of education on its payroll. Former chief inspector of schools Mike Tomlinson, who also chairs Hackney Learning Trust, is on the board; and among the company's advisers are Lord Puttnam, also a consultant to the Department for Education, and Sir Michael Bichard, former permanent secretary at the DfES.

The firm caused controversy in June, however, when it forced out the head of one of its private schools, Bury Lawn in Buckinghamshire, bringing the number of different heads at the school to five in the two years of GEMS' ownership. The outcry among parents at the level of mismanagement and a no-confidence vote in the company led nearby Milton Keynes' council to drop the company as sponsor of two new academies. Not that this dented "new" Labour's enthusiasm. Schools Minister Jacqui Smith told parliament a few weeks afterwards that "my officials are continuing their discussions with GEMS and expect to identify suitable academy proposals which would benefit from GEMS' support and experience".

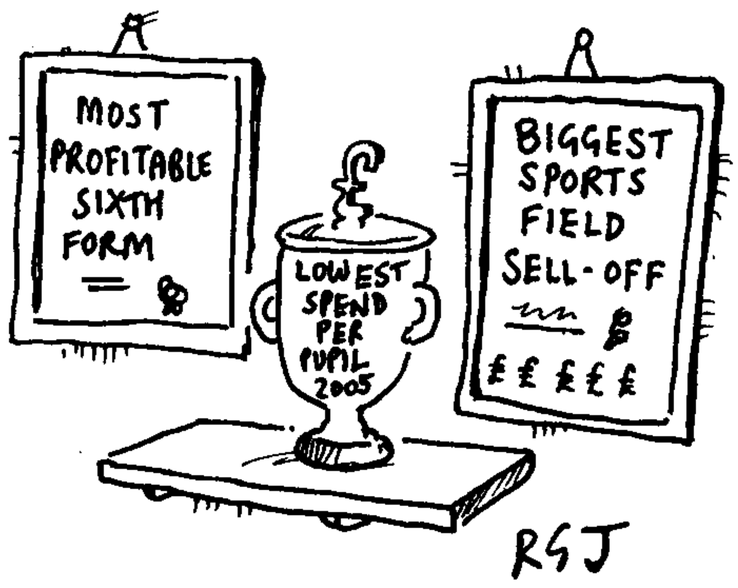
According to GEMS' accounts it made losses of £6m last year, would be insolvent but for personal guarantees from Varkey and survives on £30m of borrowings from its proprietor and the banks. Ideal credentials for running a "new" Labour business academy!

AMONG the most recently signed city academy deals is the £27m Madejski Academy in Reading, which will replace the troubled Thamesbridge college under the sponsorship of Reading FC owner, sometime Tory party donor and all-round local Mr Big, John Madejski.

Local Labour MP Martin Salter is almost as avid a fan of the academy idea as he is of its sponsor's football club, as his intervention in the Queen's speech debate in May demonstrated. "Is the Secretary of State aware of the dramatic improvement we have seen since the creation of the Madejski Academy in my constituency? Since the new management regime began, we have witnessed a 79 percent reduction in the number of days where students were excluded and a 54 percent reduction in the number of students excluded," he drooled.

Three weeks later ambitious Salter's brown-nosing was rewarded with promotion to the government as Schools Minister Jacqui Smith's parliamentary private secretary. Shame the Madejski isn't due to open until September next year at the earliest...

HAVING taken out full-page adverts in various publications last month to insist that, contrary to reports, it was not planning to close schools and services to concentrate on campaigning and lobbying, Scope, the charity for people with cerebral palsy, is to, er, close down a riding school for disabled children.



"School trophies aren't what they once were"

The charity was irked into taking out the ads by *Mail on Sunday* headlines such as "Does Scope still care about people like my son?" and "I'm devastated that my once caring charity is throwing vulnerable people on to the street". But the charity is £8m in the red, so something has to give.

In Meldreth, near Cambridge, the riding school attached to Meldreth Manor special school looks likely to close after 25 years of enabling disabled children and adults to ride.

Scope said it wants to ensure the main school remains financially sustainable but that the riding school "has been running considerable losses for some time and these cannot continue." Staff have been warned their jobs may go.

AFTER she was embarrassed into action by *Jamie's School Dinners*, Education Secretary Ruth Kelly announced new training for 15,000 school meals staff in June.

Plans were quickly prepared by the City & Guilds, and August saw the launch of a practical one-day course leading to a Level 1 award in "Providing a Healthier School Meals Service". Funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the course was supposed to take six hours to complete.

By October, however, Further Education Minister Bill Rammell had written to colleges to inform them that: "Very short courses appear to have limited benefits in terms of progression for learners. The LSC will therefore cease funding from next year very short [courses] below nine hours."

A good idea while it lasted!

JUST FANCY THAT!

£5m: Philip Green's contribution to his new Fashion Retail Academy

£10m: British taxpayers' contribution to the Academy

£352m: Amount of UK tax Green saved by paying a £1.3bn dividend to his Monaco-resident wife rather than himself

Down on the Farm

ON READING a recent report by the Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on the 2001 foot-and-mouth disaster, one bemused expert commented that "those MPs must get their brain cells from a secondhand shop".

The PAC's chairman, Edward Leigh (who at one time even fancied his chances of putting in for the Tory leadership), admitted that the government's handling of the crisis had not been perfect, but he was quick to reassure the nation that Defra had since made "good progress" in learning from those mistakes.

One point on which the MPs were agreed was that, if ever there were a repeat of the 2001 epidemic, taxpayers must never again be asked to foot the bill (estimated at £3bn). In future, as recommended by Defra, farmers must stump up all the costs themselves.

This might sound all very well to an MP, but one or two points have been overlooked. For a start, the farmers won't be given any extra say in how a future epidemic is tackled. Their job will simply be to pay for whatever the government decides must be done. And in 2001, of course, the reason the bill was so astronomic was that the government's response was an unholy shambles.

It was not the farmers who ordered that infected animals could no longer be buried on the farms where they died, but must be carted around the country to huge burial pits and funeral pyres, spreading infection as they went. It was Maff and new EU regulations forbidding on-farm burial. It was not the farmers who ordered that 9 million healthy animals be destroyed in the so-called "pre-emptive cull". It was the government, knowingly breaking the law which laid down that animals could only be destroyed when they had been exposed to infection. Had the government heeded the advice from the world's leading FMD experts, such as the late Professor Fred Brown and Dr Simon Barteling, and introduced an emergency vaccination programme to contain the disease, that bill to the taxpayers might have been cut by 90 percent.

In other words, what those supine MPs are now suggesting is that the crass incompetents in Defra should still call the shots (now armed with a whole battery of new semi-totalitarian powers to ensure their orders are carried out). Meanwhile farmers must meekly accept whatever Defra decides should be done to them and their animals, and will then be sent the entire bill. Naturally the MPs accept Defra's word that, if there were another outbreak, it would be handled better than last time. Defra has now hired more vets. It has its contingency plans in place. It might even, next time, be prepared to consider vaccination (because it has been ordered to do so by Brussels). But let us not forget what happened when in 2004 it put those plans to the test in its so-called "Operation Hornbeam", presided over by Ben Bradshaw. After a week Defra had already, according to the "simulation", slaughtered 17,400 animals and was only now considering a very limited programme of vaccination for cattle. It all seemed uncannily like a repeat of the shambles of 2001. The only difference now is that those dim-witted MPs expect farmers to pick up the tab.

'Muckspreader'

"It's unusual for a shepherd to commute"

TV

Shakespeare Retold (BBC1)
Rome (BBC2)

IN a development possibly connected to the current charter renewal debate, the BBC has suddenly become interested in the classics, in a manner of speaking. And, as we'll see, the basic problem with this theoretically commendable attempt to re-tell old stories is the manner of the speaking.

Launched within the space of a fortnight, **Rome** is an 11-part UK-US co-production (second series commissioned before the first went out) beginning with Caesar's victory over the Gauls in 52BC. **Shakespeare Retold** takes four plays from the Stratford canon and gives them modern dress and language so that *Macbeth* becomes a tragedy of an ambitious chef set in a three-star Michelin restaurant in Edinburgh, while *Much Ado About Nothing* dramatises the off-screen hostility between Bea and Ben, co-anchors of the *Wessex Tonight* regional television news programme. The weathergirl, wouldn't you know, is called Hero.

Both series feel designed to fulfil the BBC's historical remit of "education", at least in the sense that they are based on material featured heavily in the school curriculum. In practice, though, *Rome* is so graphically and violently sexual that it has to be shown after the watershed with a draconian warning about content. And *Shakespeare Retold*, though tame enough in content to begin at 8.30, in fact does a disservice to English exam students by accepting the educationally dubious view that what matters about Shakespeare is not the plots but the language. In fact, what has cynically emerged in both cases are series which have enough of a vaguely highbrow feel to be mentioned in annual reports and mentioned to House of Commons select committees but which are populist enough in content to keep the ratings high.

Accordingly, while *Rome* does betray some decent historical research – it was a terrible thing for a soldier's standard to be stolen, servants stood watching during lovemaking – the episodes largely consist of a succession of the most bloody or erotic scenes possible: a massive battle is followed by a scourging, then an orgy, then a crucifixion and then a naked bathing scene. In the latter, it's notable that none of the vast catalogue of historical advisers listed in the credits has dared to raise the question of whether the actress's Brazilian is anachronistic.

Shakespeare Retold has also disappointingly gone for the obvious. Three of the four adaptations find equivalents for Shakespeare's characters in people who are on television: newsreaders, a celebrity chef, a prominent politician. This may reflect the values of the modern media world but it is a pity because, except in the history plays, celebrity was not a major Shakesperean theme.

Also, anything in the original texts now considered problematic – virginity, the supernatural, racism – is ruthlessly removed. *Taming of the Shrew* – where the plot entirely depends on obedience to fathers and then husbands – can't be cleaned up without losing everything so the solution of writer Sally Wainwright is to make this a "political" marriage which is happening purely to further the MP's career. A more exact parallel – an Asian "arranged" marriage – has presumably been avoided for reasons of cultural cowardice.

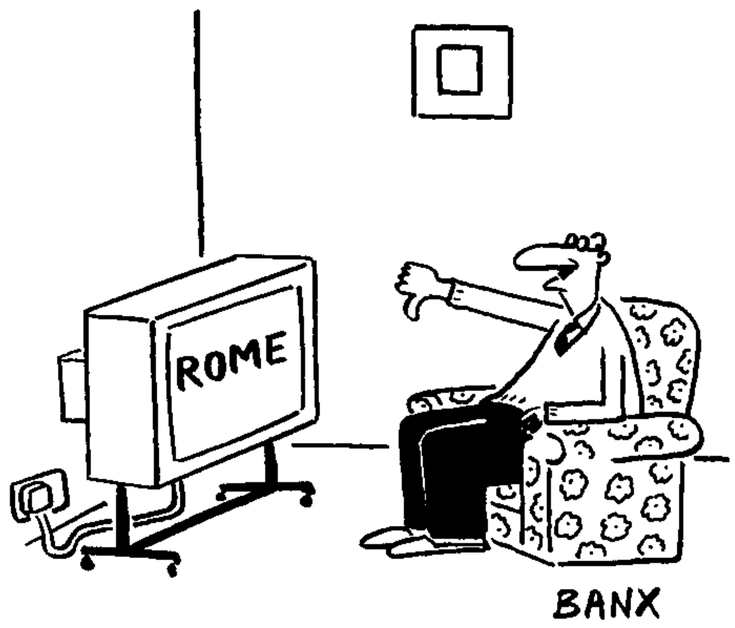
But, finally, both series fail on that manner of speaking. Admittedly, pedantry about speech patterns in historical dramas is ludicrous. Nobody knows how Romans would have spoken conversationally and a true purist would have to demand the whole thing take place in Latin. Even so, you don't have to be Regius Professor of Classics to bristle when, in Bruno Heller's script, a character enters a room with the words "Brutus, me old cock" and the reply is: "Mark Anthony, how nice."

At the moment the BBC is pretending that everything is *EastEnders – Bleak House* is being enthusiastically promoted in trailers as Bleak 'Arse, Dickens's version of *EastEnders* – but it would be a bit depressing if the only vocal register acceptable on television is now the Mitchell Brothers. And, in *Rome*, Heller keeps switching between the demotic and the poncey so that someone will suddenly speak like a Mary Renault character – "Bring him back safe or I'll use the eyes of your children for beads" – only to be followed by an ancient maiden sounding like a character in *Cold Feet*: "I think I'm gonna have to divorce my husband."

Shakespeare Retold is even more alarming in this respect because, in this case, we do know exactly how the people originally spoke. It's therefore hard to avoid a sense of loss when Petruchio says: "I'm going to rip your knickers off" or Macbeth is telling people to put plates under the lights rather than speaking some of the most famous soliloquies in theatre.

Aware that he is offering the linguistic equivalent of *Hamlet* without the prince, David Nicholls, who has done the *Much Ado*, includes a scene in which presenter Ben reads Sonnet 116, which he plans to read at weathergirl Hero's wedding, to hated co-anchor Bea. Though suspiciously similar to a scene in *10 Things I Hate About You* (a Hollywood updating of *Shrew*, far superior to any of these attempts), this works dramatically as a way of the couple discovering their true feelings for each other, at least until the BBC gets all educational on us and Bea corrects Ben's metre: "No, say fix-ed: it's iambic!" The problem is, though, that this scene shows up the paucity of the modern speech. God help us if this is what now passes for prestige television: get out DVDs of *I, Claudius*, Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth* and even Ken and Emma's *Much Ado* instead.

'Remote Controller'



MEDIA NEWS

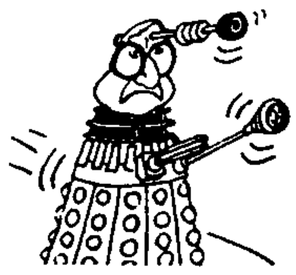
THE BBC's decision to launch an Arabic TV service is, says the Beeb, all about "responding to a fast changing media landscape". In fact the motive is entirely political.

Back in 1994 the Beeb spent £200m building up an Arabic TV station with the Saudis. The project lasted two years before the guardians of the holy sites pulled the plug, citing "editorial difficulties", confiscating all the corporation's broadcasting equipment in order to flog it to Al-Jazeera.

The last straw for the House of Saud? It was the channel's coverage of the freezing by King Fahd of the assets of a young businessman called Osama bin Laden. When the project collapsed, John Major's government, ever mindful of the urgent, commercial need to suck up to Fahd and his cronies, refused to back the BBC out and that was that.

But Tony Blair's government needs a different spin. "Independent" news of the war against terror suits the current Departure of Culture, Media 'n' Sport just fine; and with the BBC so keen to do everything the government decrees, now is a perfect opportunity to exploit the World Service brand in a new venture – ironically at the cost of some 236 World Service jobs.

BIRTSPEAK



"WE will no longer be called BBC Broadcast," reveals BBC Broadcast in a memo to all staff.

"We wanted a name that reflected where we have come from. When we were Broadcasting and Presentation we were known as B&P. As BBC Broadcast we have been known as BBCB. So an evolutionary step was to play with the sound 'B'".

"The spelling as 'Bee' came from an internal brainstorm when we were looking at nature's expert navigators, because as a company facing the digital future we need to help the consumer become equally adept as navigators."

MAYBE it was something to do with the ghoulish atmosphere of Halloween, but when a bomb went off in Basra on 31 October the BBC seemed unusually keen to find out what the body count was.

When one of its news producers contacted the Ministry of Defence, his first demand was: "You must tell me if three British soldiers have died."

The reason? The Beeb has been preparing a special report to commemorate the 100th death of a member of the armed forces in Iraq and has spent the last few weeks digging up memories of death with those who have lost close relatives. With the death toll at 97 at the last count, the producer was eager to reach his target, explaining that his bosses "are dying to know when to run the piece but we have been three bodies short of our story for ages now".

Sadly for the BBC, in this case several Iraqi civilians died in the blast but no British soldiers – so news of the bomb failed to make the cut.

PS: When reminded that the number of combat deaths in Iraq is actually 64 in the last two-and-a-half years (33 others have died as a result of illness, road accidents or other non-operational causes), the Beeb's response was: "Well, that should help us to run two '100 British deaths' round-ups rather than just the one."

LATEST STORIES
▸Blunkett resigns from Cabinet
▸I am not resigning, says Blunkett

BBC News Website

LAST used to film ducks and geese on Lea Valley ponds, the BBC News helicopter has once again taken to the skies – this time to snatch pointless shots of David Blunkett travelling by car to the Foreign Press Association.

John Sopel was on hand to talk viewers through the sensational pictures: "You can probably see the tail on his guide dog wagging – this from our helicopter".

FACT: BBC News has been asked to save around £2.3m over the next two years.

WHEN Siemens finally won its bid for BBC Technology as part of the Beeb's "strategy" to flog assets funded by the licence-payer to private sector companies, it was given a brief to "revolutionise the use of technology within the corporation".

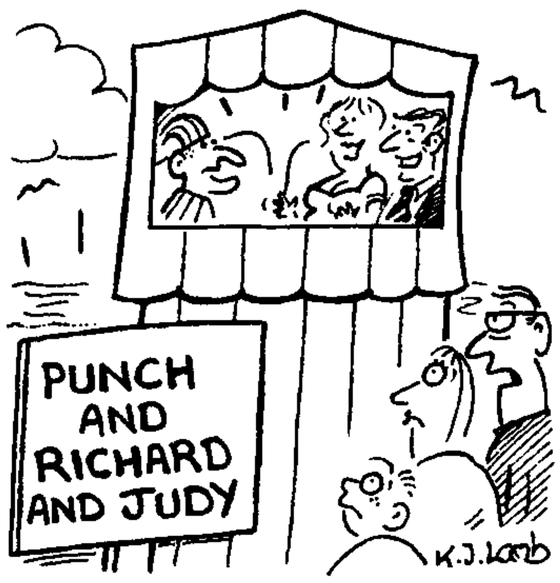
Siemens has certainly done this – not least by giving 300 senior executives, including Mark Thompson, snazzy, Blackberry email assistants. Alas, following the revelation that people could read supposedly secure emails not intended for them, the service has been suspended.

BBC Property has finally decided to act following a series of disasters revealed by the press.

These include the failure to find enough tenants for its BBC Media Village and the humiliating collapse of its "outsourced" contract with Land Securities Trillium which was supposed to share the costs of the White City project. Back in May, you may recall, the corporation was forced to buy out LST's share, raising its off-balance sheet debt to £1.2bn.

Now there are new reports of more disasters at the new Broadcasting House. The architect responsible for the flagship £800m building has quit following a row about some of his more lavish designs. The head of corporate real estate has at last decided that enough is enough – all staff are now forbidden to talk to the press.

"Staff are not allowed to take calls or talk to journalists without the prior permission of the press office," he warns. "If you receive calls from journalists, or *Ariel*, please direct them to the BBC Press Office." *Ariel* is, of course, the BBC's own in-house "newspaper", thus the BBC is censoring its own coverage of its own internal affairs.



"It's not very exciting – they just sit on the sofa and chat"

SO, farewell then, to the Express Shopping Channel, which despite almost daily plugs in the *Daily Express* shut up shop last month after only a year.

Shunted from Sky digiboxes, its only memorial is a promise on its website that: "If you have recently placed an order it will be with you shortly."

Richard Desmond set up the venture last year promising to capitalise on the *Express* name as "the most reassuring, trustworthy brand" in England, but will now presumably be reduced to recycling any leftover stock of "shapely figures" lingerie "for real women in sizes up to 48" for use on some of his other television channels.

THE usual policy at News Corporation is that when scandal erupts in one part of the Murdoch empire, the others politely refrain from drawing attention to it.

Last week, however, Sky News was the first to break the story of *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade's arrest on suspicion of assaulting her husband, and followed the story up enthusiastically over the next 24 hours. While commentators mused over what this apparent withdrawal of privileges meant for the future of Ms Wade's career, they failed to notice one small detail. While most other reports mentioned that Wade and her husband had been at a party thrown by Matthew Freud and his wife Elizabeth Murdoch until the early hours of the morning, the names of the boss's daughter and son-in-law were curiously absent from Sky's coverage.

Instead, crime correspondent Martin Brunt told viewers that the couple had been "out drinking with ex-cabinet minister David Blunkett" – which indeed, they had, a mere nine hours before the incident occurred.

THE gala launch of itv4 last Tuesday was sullied by the news that Sky customers would not be able to receive the new channel until a week later.

Sky blamed "administrative issues" for the cock-up. By happy coincidence, however, the day before the itv4 launch Sky's own new entertainment channel, Sky Three, crackled into life – no doubt Sky Three's controllers were delighted to have their rival mysteriously sidelined while they set up shop on the same turf.

DUMB BRITAIN

Radio Mercury
Presenter: What is 9 times 20?
Contestant: 180.
Presenter: Well done. Good addition.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What is the only even number that is also a prime number?
Contestant: 9.
AR: Which survey, completed in 1086, was used to solve a property dispute more than 800 years later?
Contestant: The Great Fire of London.

Capital Radio
Johnny Vaughan: When was the Great Fire of London?
Contestant: 1962.
Next contestant: 1066.

THE launch of ITV's new male-oriented channel itv4 has been accompanied by a predictable cash splurge on branding and idents.

As ever, several hundred thousand pounds gets you very little – in this case two screens melding to create a new image, so that, for example, a cloudy sky turns in to a face. The idents are by a company called Red Bee Media; and ITV's brief for the work was "a collision of opposites". This seems strangely apt as Red Bee Media, now working for ITV, was up until last week known as BBC Broadcast.

AD NAUSEAM

MUCH consternation at the Advertising Standards Authority over the thorny implications of a mannequin's erect nipple.

The matter arose after a TV ad by JWT for the all new Mazda 5 prompted more than 400 complaints to the watchdog from viewers.

In the ad, a group of mannequins becomes aroused after a ride in the back of the new car. One hitches up her negligee, another giggles and another looks like she's in the throes of orgasm. All this because the new Mazda 5 is, as the voiceover concludes, "Surprisingly stimulating".

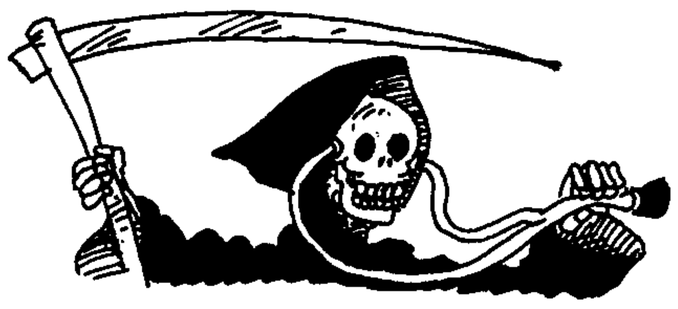
More surprising was that the ASA let every one of the complaints go, even though only four ads in history have ever attracted more protest. The CAP codes on Television Advertising Standards dedicate a special section to automotive advertising, which states that "any references to power, acceleration or handling characteristics [in a car advert] must not imply excitement".

The ASA chose not to classify stimulation as excitement, instead saying that the ad's intent was to present "the absurd notion that an inanimate object could be turned on". Which might be said for the ASA as well.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

BURBERRY
BOARD ROOM
WE'VE GONE FROM BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE, TO BEING ASSOCIATED WITH COMMON CHAVS!
AT LAST.... PEOPLE WITH MONEY!!!
HOORAY!!!



DOING THE ROUNDS

WHY are we handing over vast sums of public money to private companies to build new hospitals that aren't viable?

The latest estimate of the build cost for PFI hospitals in the pipeline is £17.5bn. Add in consultancy fees, hidden costs and the interest on repayments over 25 years, and the cost to taxpayers is almost trebled. The shiny new hospitals are an easy vote-winner at election time, but the government's reforms aim to strip hospital treatment to the minimum and transfer as much as possible into the community. Unless Chancellor Gordon Brown steps in, as many as 50 NHS hospitals could go bankrupt in the next two years and the newest are among the most vulnerable.

A particular problem for all PFI hospitals is that, by nature of their huge debts, they have above average costs. But the tariff they can charge for work under the Payment By Results scheme is calculated as a national average (ie less than it costs the PFI hospital), so they have great trouble making money.

Add in the unfair competition from private treatment centres who have been given guaranteed contracts at above-tariff prices to poach easy cases from hospitals, and it's not hard to see why many hospitals are in financial meltdown. So why are we building more?

The biggest PFI project in planning is a £1.9bn rebuild of Bart's and the Royal London (up from £1.2bn initially) which includes £480m in interest and fees alone over the nine-year construction. This will land the new hospital with a staggering £4.6bn debt before it opens its doors, payable at a rate of £115m a year for the lifetime of the contract. The consortium behind it reckons it will get two thirds from existing budgets, and a third from extra activity under Payment By Results.

Back on earth, Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt is launching Healthcare Outside Hospitals and GPs are being forced to take on "practice-based commissioning", both of which have the prime intention of sucking money and patients back into primary care.

Many people working in the NHS believe the philosophy of PFI is wrong. In Paul Foot's words, it represents "an enormous transfer in power in Britain from public, elected authorities to private, unelected corporations." Even worse though is the government's misguided execution. Just as the largest hospital-building programme in NHS history is going through, it closes down NHS Estates, the body charged with ensuring projects are cost effective, ethical and fit for their purpose. It then institutes a reform programme that takes business away from hospitals.

Then, when projects go belly up, the government hides. NHS chief executive Nigel Crisp, former health ministers John Hutton and Stephen Ladyman – all big supporters of the Paddington Health Campus project which collapsed in ignominy in June (see last *Eye*) – simply refused to take part in the investigation of one of the worst NHS management fiascos of the last decade.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

SO ALTHOUGH THERE'S A PERFECTLY GOOD DRUG FOR MY CONDITION YOU CAN'T GIVE IT TO ME BECAUSE OF COST?
YES
THAT'S CRAZY, IT JUST DOES MY HEAD IN
OH DEAR...
WE CAN'T FIX THAT EITHER
OVER BUDGET

SIGNAL FAILURES

Public 'insultation'

THE *Eye* wasn't the first to spot the pointlessness of the public consultation on the "greater western" franchise – launched by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) the day *after* final franchise bids were ordered (*Eye* 1135). The Freedom of Information Act has revealed the SRA itself had realised the problem of "inability to change specification" once consultation responses were collated, and even feared judicial review.

The SRA was told by the Department for Transport (DfT) to drop its custom of consulting before final bidding, which left the SRA wondering: "What is our external line to take?"

Potential lines included: "The option development work is sufficiently complex that we feel it would be better to work through in more detail before consulting." That spin was far more likely to meet "new" Labour approval than the alternative of: "DfT have asked that we defer consultation until next spring" – ie telling the truth. It wasn't until the disclosure under the FoIA that Transport Secretary Alistair Darling and his officials were unmasked as the culprits.

ONE of the three contenders for the "greater western" franchise is FirstGroup, so officials are turning a blind eye to its pisspoor management of the existing franchises.

Latest figures show First Great Western is the least punctual intercity franchise, having slumped to 75 percent on time. First Great Western Link, which provides local trains to Paddington, is by far the least punctual London commuter franchise, having slipped to 83 percent on time (and just 73 percent in the morning and evening peaks).

None of this will surprise the unfortunates stuck with WorstGroup's bus services (still unregulated outside London more than eight years after Labour came to office). WorstGroup is too busy cranking out profits (more than £100m a year from UK buses alone) to maintain its vehicles properly in many areas (*Eye* 1123).

Last month First Edinburgh was subjected to its second public inquiry in less than a year over poor bus maintenance, and colleagues at First Glasgow await the outcome of a similar inquiry. Even Britain's senior traffic commissioner has said WorstGroup's Bristol bus firm deserves "to be put out of business" unless it gets its act together – unlikely given that it's been subjected to three maintenance inquiries in less than five years.

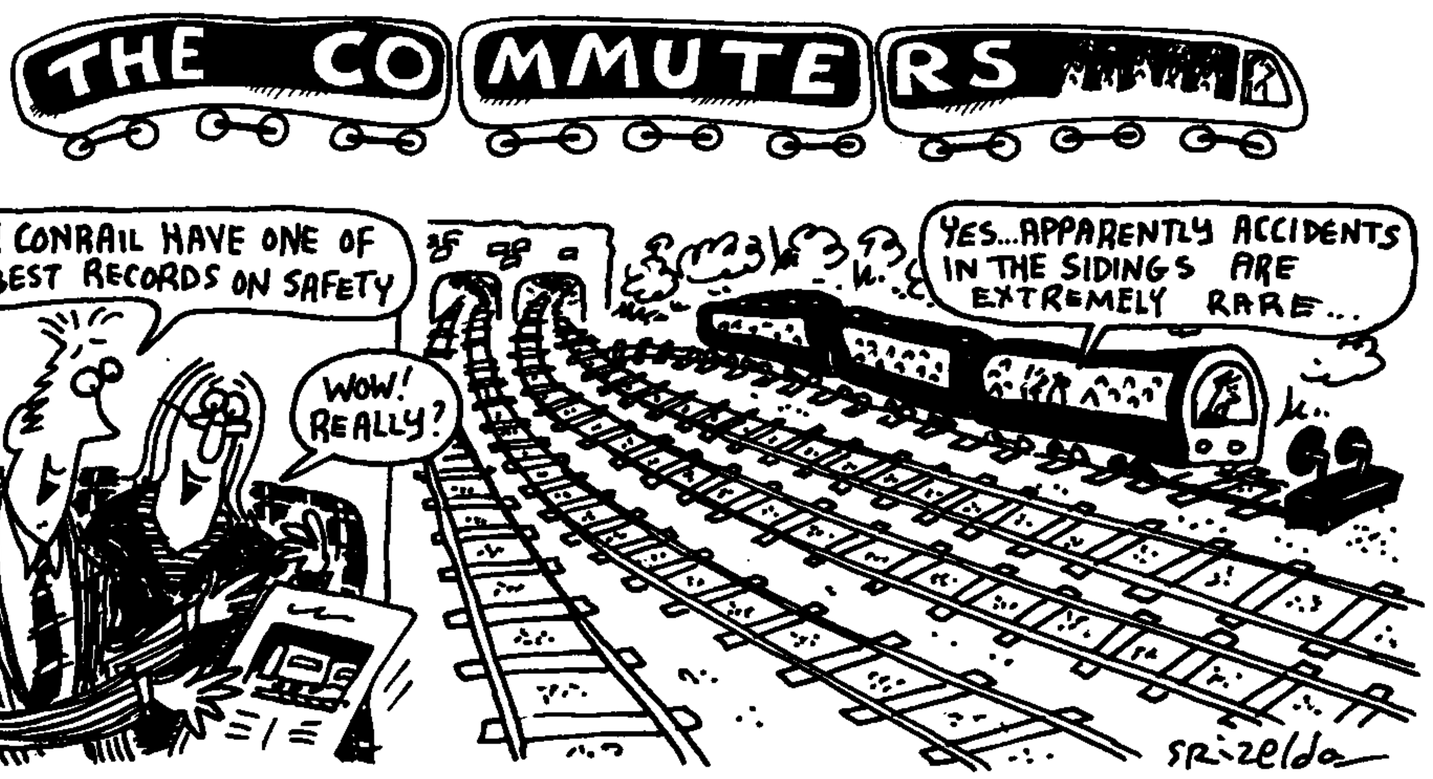
WorstGroup's latest wheeze is to use fluctuating global oil prices as an excuse to squeeze even more cash from some of Britain's poorest people. Last month its bus firm in South Yorkshire, officially one of the European Union's most deprived regions, raised fares for the fourth time in a year, notching up a 36 percent increase in just 18 months. The latest rise was "forced" by "the increasing costs of fuel and also rising insurance and payroll costs", it told the *Sheffield Star*. What it forgot to say was that FirstGroup has a deal guaranteeing that its entire fuel supply for 2005-6 will cost no more than $37 a barrel – immunising the company from price rises after hurricane Katrina which peaked at $71 a barrel.

That contribution to social inclusion is something else for "new" Labour to ignore as it hands out the next three lucrative rail franchises: FirstGroup is shortlisted for all three.

PASSENGERS trapped for more than five hours on a broken Virgin Cross-country train near Edinburgh on 28 October would have been reassured to read later that the problem was "extremely rare", according to Virgin Trains.

Presumably it was as rare as the seven-hour delay for passengers near Oxford in July and the train failure that trapped passengers for up to five hours at Stockport in April (*Eye* 1138) – both courtesy of Virgin Trains.

'Dr B Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
LOOK! CONRAIL HAVE ONE OF THE BEST RECORDS ON SAFETY
WOW! REALLY?
YES...APPARENTLY ACCIDENTS IN THE SIDINGS ARE EXTREMELY RARE...
SR-zelda

Mr Rove found Mr Bush as a gland-handing good ol' boy trading on his family name and his charm. He turned him into an effective candidate, and eventually, a president.

grauniad

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

FORT FOR THE DAY

ALDERNEY States member John Postlethwaite made an interesting remark recently which other politicians might like to dwell upon. "If everyone knows you've got a conflict of interest," he declared, "then it doesn't matter."

Thus Mr Postlethwaite squares being deputy chair of the island's policy and finance committee, a prominent estate agent and a champion of developers.

Postlethwaite and fellow States member Lt Col Peter Walter (retd) have spent the past year engineering the sale of Alderney's magnificent but redundant Fort Tourgis to developer Victor Levine in the teeth of furious local opposition.

Levine, whose original offer of just £1 for the huge Victorian clifftop fort and adjacent lands was nearly accepted, will now have to pay £1m – far less than other developers have offered, but still a bargain for his plans which have been described as "architectural vandalism". Levine's plan is to castellate the listed fort – to give it a "William the Conqueror feel" – add a glass roof and develop it into 62 luxury apartments.

Although rival plans included hotel and conference facilities which would bring investment to the island, Levine's scheme has received the support of Walter and Postlethwaite from the start. The pair ensured that it made it on to the shortlist of development ideas and publicly rubbished rival schemes.

Postlethwaite said that if people did not support Levine's bid, "the only option is to buy large rolls of barbed wire, surround the fort with an impenetrable barrier, put a 'danger keep out' sign and let the building collapse into a derelict ruin."

Walter and Postlethwaite have admitted that they were treated to a tour, with overnight stay, of Levine's other developments on the mainland before the decision was made – a fact-finding exercise afforded to no other States members, nor one requested of other developers.

Postlethwaite also happens to be one of three estate agents on the island who would stand to benefit from housing rather than a hotel development of the fort. Indeed, his firm is currently advertising six other properties for which he has voted to give planning permission. But maybe that's just the refreshing, out-in-the-open way they do things down there.

SWIMMING IN IT

ONE of the most unsavoury examples of "outsourcing" to have affected former public services has been the transfer of public swimming pools to private operators such as Leisure Connection (*Eyes* passim).

In south London the Streatham leisure centre pool has shut its doors 20 times in the last nine months. Ten of the closures were down to boiler failure, eight were due to the discovery of vomit or faeces in the pool, two were down to staff absenteeism. The manager was suspended in July, pending an internal investigation. Despite all this **Lambeth** Council carries on with its contract with LC, even though, since 2003, the company has been a major debtor according to the council's environment performance digest reports. As of July this year LC owed Lambeth more than £150,000.

LC's contract for **East Cambridge** District Council includes running the Ely Paradise Pool, where swimming lessons for children attending King's school, a pre-prep school for four-to-seven-year-olds, have been cancelled indefinitely after parents branded the pool "disgusting". Parents and the head teacher, Felicity Blake, stopped children going there after urine and faeces were found covering the floor of the changing rooms. This was after a six-month, £300,000 refurbishment.

In **Hackney**, east London, few tears are being shed as LC bows out. The premature termination of the 15-year contract is not good news for shareholders though, as the firm received £1.5m a year, regardless of whether any of the borough's four swimming pools were open or not (*Eye* 1100).

In the last days of LC's time there, swimmer Claudia Rymer found a tampon in the King's Hall swimming pool. Staff didn't seem bothered, so she had to remove it herself. She then pointed out where she had put it to a lifeguard, who kicked it into a corner. Anyone for a dip?

STANDARDS BAWD

ENFIELD Labour councillor Chris Bond got a slap on the wrist from the Standards Board for England in November last year for sending texts and emails containing smutty jokes to a colleague, group whip Jayne Buckland.

Cllr Buckland seemed to appreciate the jokes at first, but stopped finding them funny after the couple found themselves on opposite sides in an internal Labour Party power struggle. What was once humorous was now "harassment". Cllr Bond got a phone call from the police and was suspended from the party for a year while the SBE's "investigation" process unfolded.

The SBE found that the jokes had been a personal matter but, because of the police involvement, and because in the course of an argument he had referred to a third councillor as a "f***ing c***", Cllr Bond had "brought his office into disrepute". He apologised and no further action was taken.

Meanwhile, apparent discrepancies in Cllr Buckland's evidence against Bond led the SBE to launch an investigation into *her* – which concluded that she had provided a false statement and had given other misleading information. But no further action was required, said the SBE. The Labour Party agreed.

Hang on a minute, said Bond. If the principal witness against someone in a court of law was found to have lied, the conviction would be overturned. But not in Standards Board land, where it is possible for contradictory findings to exist side-by-side. Cllr Bond has asked the SBE for its full adjudication in the Buckland case, so he can find out exactly what she lied about and repair his reputation. Needless to say, the SBE refuses to let him see it.

"This is Rawsthorne. He's in charge of not causing offence to those of a non-Christian faith..."

BUM DEAL

BEDFORDSHIRE farmer Steve Bumstead regrets the day he signed up for the Bedfordshire Farm Woodland Demonstration project, an EU-funded wheeze to reward farmers for growing trees instead of crops.

Alas the process of dishing out the eurodosh was left to Tory Bedfordshire County Council, which bungled the job spectacularly. Compensation for Bumstead's loss of income was either not forthcoming or fell well short of his actual losses. Four years ago the county council handed Bumstead a derisory £3,800 – around £80,000 short of his actual losses. After years more wrangling a meeting was held in September attended by Bumstead, N.E. Bedfordshire MP Alistair Burt and Cllr Richard Stay, holder of BCC's finance portfolio. An offer of £68,000 was made in settlement. This still fell some way short of Bumstead's losses, so he turned it down. His fight for adequate compensation continues.

The *Eye* has in its possession internal council emails that throw an interesting light on how senior council officers really discuss such matters. One, written by a senior BCC officer to deputy chief executive Jonathon Flowers, records his surprise when Bumstead wouldn't be bought by the £68,000 offer. Apparently concurring with an earlier email from Flowers, the officer writes: "I thought Bumstead would have taken the 68k to (*sic*). You heard right he did tell Stay to stick it up his arse. Burt *(local MP)* is panicking, Russell *(leader of BCC)* is shitting her knickers… I'm sick of the whole thing and a public enquiry will be bad for us all. Keep me up to speed hotmail only!!"

Flowers' reply refers to pressure from the local newspaper, *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, for the release of documents about the affair under the Freedom of Information Act: "As for *BoS*, maintain that there is too much documentation. They will lose interest soon. Leaning on Bumstead did not work, just play for time and dont (*sic*) take his calls."

No doubt an amicable agreement will be reached soon!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I LOVE THE THRILL OF PAINTBALLING! GOING MANO-A-MANO IN THE WILDERNESS...
PITTING ONE'S WITS IN A VISCERAL SCENARIO WHERE ONE IS LIVING AT THE VERY EDGES
AND BEST OF ALL WE GET TO DISCOVER THE "BODY AS CANVAS"
THE RESONANCE IS OVERPOWERING!!

LUVVIES

"I've lit cigarettes for her and I've touched her hand, but I'm still not certain that Tilda Swinton is mortal or composed of the same crude matter that you and I are. I suspect that she dreamed herself into existence and may dream herself out of it at any moment, only to reappear 500 years from now as either mankind's Messiah, its Destroyer, or the Eternal Mother of us all. She's perfectly capable of playing all three, and probably will before she's done."

WALTER KIRN
BlackBook Magazine

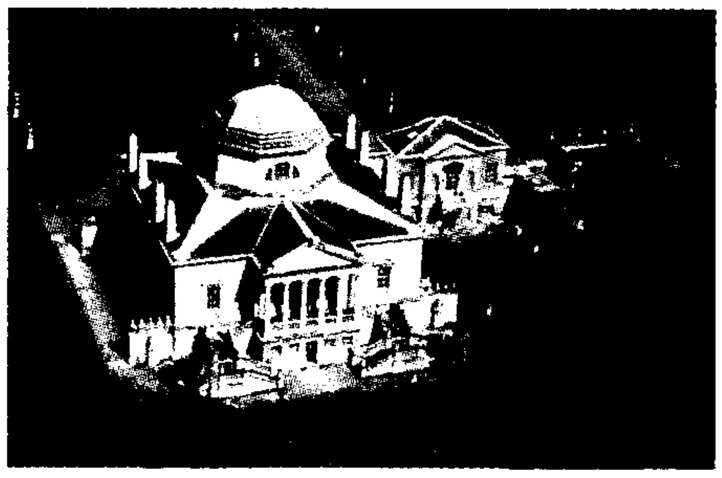
Submitted by Andrew Blackman.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

NOOKS and CORNERS

CHISWICK House is the most celebrated and accessible Palladian villa in the land. Built after 1726, the creation of that grand and prissy aesthete, the 3rd Earl of Burlington, it testifies to the enduring hold the architecture of Andrea Palladio in the Veneto had and has over the British imagination.

Originally an annexe to an older (and now long demolished) house near the Thames, it was an essay in austere, elegant geometry, with a succession of small rooms – rectangular or octagonal – richly decorated by Burlington's, um, *protégé* William Kent, arranged axially and symmetrically within a tight box. Nor is Chiswick's importance just architectural, for this potent reminiscence of Italy stands in a picturesque landscape by Kent, ornamented with a lake, temples and other garden features. These grounds are an enchanting oasis surrounded by suburbia.



Despite its fame Chiswick has had a sad modern history. Inherited by the Dukes of Devonshire, it was let to a series of tenants in the late 19th century before becoming a private lunatic asylum. In 1929, the estate was sold to the borough of Brentford & Chiswick, which was happy to run the gardens as a public park but which neglected the villa and would have been happy to demolish it.

In 1948, the Chiswick villa and the garden temples were taken into care by the Ministry of Works. Unfortunately as part of a restoration the later wings, built in 1788 and in poor condition, were demolished, leaving the villa isolated – as it was never intended to be – and without any ancillary accommodation or services.

All this helps to explain why the current proposals made by a new trust, created by an alliance between the London borough of Hounslow (which continues to run the park) and English Heritage (successor to the Ministry of Works and the Department of the Environment), have caused much fury among local residents and architectural historians.

The new Chiswick House Park and Gardens Trust has submitted a £12m bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a scheme for the "regeneration" of house and grounds. These proposals were drawn up after the minimum of public consultation (which did not reveal the more controversial aspects) and have provoked the resignation of John Harris, the authority on Lord Burlington and Palladianism, for "demeaning one of our greatest buildings."

The principal element is essentially a revival of a controversial scheme howled down in 1977: a new Facility Building and Interpretation Centre. This is to be built next to the Summer Parlour, a room by Burlington at the end of the Link Building – a sort of grand corridor which originally connected the villa with old Chiswick House. When the later wings were demolished, the Link Building was recreated by the Ministry of Works even though it now goes nowhere. It therefore makes sense to make it go somewhere, by connecting it with the new facility. And it is undoubtedly true that Chiswick needs somewhere for ticket sales, a shop and other facilities.

The objection is that, to make any sense, the villa should be entered via Burlington's grand Corinthian portico or through the door below (the present entrance) and *not* via the Link Building, a side corridor that connects with one of the minor rooms on the *piano nobile*. Disabled access at Chiswick is certainly a problem, as at present there are only spiral staircases from the basement to the principal floor in the villa itself; but conventional wheelchairs will not go through Burlington's doors in the Link – so either they will have to be widened or special equipment installed.

But the main objection is that the proposals are designed to encourage the use of Chiswick for corporate entertainment. The fact is the grand rooms at Chiswick, small and exquisite as they are, are just not suited to business junkets. Furthermore, corporate entertainment will prevent the full restoration of the interior.

To attract corporate types (who naturally don't use public transport), the northern half of the big walled Kitchen Gardens – first laid out in 1683 – is to be made into a car park to be accessed by new roads. (which actually impinge on one of Kent's formal avenues). Apart from being offensive in itself, this will displace the current Kitchen Garden Project for young people being run, very successfully, by the Chiswick Horticultural Society. Then there is the proposal to build a smart new restaurant and to demolish the existing Burlington Café, an interesting Modern building designed in 1952 by George Chuter which is very popular with locals.

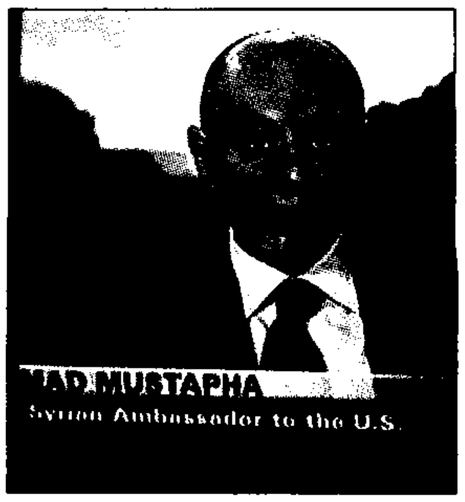
Of course the Chiswick villa and its park should be restored, and it is reasonable, in principle, to wish to generate more income. While I have little time for Hounslow, which has underfunded Chiswick for years and wants to be rid of any financial responsibility, I have some sympathy for impoverished English Heritage, with its budget repeatedly cut by our philistine government while more and more is spent on sport (rumour has it that Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State, now declines to communicate with Sir Neil Cossons, EH's distinguished chairman). But the present, semi-secret and ill-thought-out plans are not the way to achieve these desirable ends. The Heritage Lottery Fund should tell the trust to think again.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Say what you like, he's brought a bit of colour to the Art World.
HIRST MOST POWERFUL PERSON IN ART. TOPS POWER 100 LIST IN ART REVIEW MAGAZINE



I-SPY

BBC Parliament

Submitted by James McLaren. £10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

PITY the poor organist. There was a time when he was *someone* in society: your local Mr Music, handsomely endowed with instruments in every church and hall, and represented by an august professional body of power and influence, the Royal College of Organists (patron, Her Maj). But times have changed.

It's rare these days to find a church with an instrument in something better than a state of near-demise. Concert halls don't seem to bother any more. And visitors to the swish new Cadogan Hall in Chelsea, converted from a former church and now the home of the RPO, have been surprised to find that the perfectly useable organ installed there in its days of worship has been ripped out – a matter of growing concern among the *musicisti* of Sloane Square who are beginning to ask awkward questions. Like who sanctioned the removal and on what grounds?

As symbolic gestures go, it couldn't have been more inept.

Of still greater concern in the organ world is the desperate mess at its Royal College. Up until the 1990s the RCO was housed, as befitted its status, in a grand building beside the Albert Hall where, among other things, it maintained an internationally-distinguished library and an archive rich in manuscripts and other treasures. Then, in the 1990s, it found it couldn't afford to renew the lease and was forced to move to humbler, clearly inadequate premises in a sort of church hall attached to St Andrews, Holborn. A dreadful come-down.

Three years ago, though, the college received an offer it couldn't refuse – from Birmingham City Council who said: if you move to the Midlands we'll give you the impressive classical hulk of the former Curzon Street Station, grade I listed but available for speedy conversion. The conversion costs of £8.5m would be largely covered by grants from the council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Development Fund. All the college had to find was £650,000. And on that basis a deal was struck. The college relocated to a temporary office overlooking Curzon Street. Architects and builders went into action. And the revamped building, complete with recital hall and brand new concert organ, was scheduled to open next autumn.

But now it won't because the entire scheme has collapsed – amid a thundering row in which the politicians are blaming the organists for not doing their sums right, and the organists are blaming the politicians for reneging on their promises.

As things stand it's hard to know where the truth lies. But the certainty is that the poor old RCO found it couldn't raise even the relatively small amount of its contribution and at the same time find the cash to run the building. Result: much egg on many faces, and what looks very like a death-blow to the self-esteem of British organists.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Deadly satire

Sir

As a long-time subscriber I have seen numerous subscription-cancelling letters. However, I have never felt the need to comment on one until now.

In Mr Rice's letter headed "Cheap Shot", he very politely explains his desire to cancel as he thinks you went "beyond the limit" on your piece about the tragic murder of Sally Anne Bowman.

Can I just say – in your defence – that I personally think you squarely hit the nail on the head with one of the most scathing bits of satire I have witnessed in a long time.

I have been sickened by the way most of the media seemed to relish the fact that the victim of this horrific murder was an attractive young girl with a ready-made portfolio of the kinds of images most papers have to put on front pages IN ADDITION to the main story. Gone was the need to use the same image across the board (as usually seen in these terrible cases), and instead any opportunity to publish yet another glossy and racy image was pounced on with the mindless and nauseating fervour of the rabid pack-rats our media has become.

Yours,
STEVE JEWESS,

Bracknell.

Lookalike

Sideshow Bob

Phil Spector

Sir,

Perhaps Bart was wrong, and Sideshow Bob really was innocent of robbing the Kwik-E-Mart. There is, after all, more than a passing resemblance. Perhaps we will be told?

KEN TOUGH,

Via email.

Green shouts

Sir,

Muckspreader should get out of the tractor cab more. Just because environmentalists resort to the saner parts of European legislation when possible, it hardly amounts to them being "enthusiastic supporters" of the EU. On the contrary, the EU is continually being attacked for such manifest failures as the fisheries policy, the common agricultural policy, and the programme of Euroroute road building. The Green Party, for example, is the only British party other than UKIP overtly against the EU. The reason is simple. The EU exists to promote the kind of economic model – centralisation, more roads, more airports, more consumerism – that creates the environmental mess in the first place.

Yours sincerely,
KEN HAGGETT,

Lincoln.

Should I stop eating children?

Antrim Guardian

Statement of despair

Sir,

Your correspondent Mr Stone and yourselves are quite right. Special needs provision for needy children has declined quite markedly, and this is a deliberate policy of, particularly, this present Government. Ever since their "revised" code of practice on SEN basically said that virtually no child should ever get a statement of SEN again (which carries additional funding), LEAs have seized on it with glee and gusto and ruthlessly deprived children who urgently need help. They prefer to spend the money (oops, our money), on fat salaries for themselves, general beanos and a mountain of admin and "consultancy" jobs, which benefit children so imperceptibly as to be invisible.

Yours,
IRVIN CRAWFORD
(ex SEN co-ordinator and "consultant"),

Via email.

SEN sensibility

Sir,

Further to your piece (14 October) and John Stone's letter (28 October), Wandsworth has always been highly sceptical about the headlong rush to inclusion of youngsters with Special Educational Needs (SEN), which is why we have the highest number of Special School places per head of population of any London borough. But the pattern of our provision is essentially unchanged since we inherited education from the Inner London Education Authority in 1990, while the needs of the clients are changing.

1. A growing number of parents of youngsters with relatively mild SEN are choosing mainstream schools for their children. This is in part a reflection of the growing effectiveness of mainstream schools in providing a suitable social and educational experience for them.

2. Schools like Chartfield, our secondary school for "delicate" children, are seeing their roll fall from over 100 to below 70 over the last five years, making it increasingly difficult to provide a full curriculum.

3. We are seeing a marked increase in some of the more severe SEN cases, notably autism and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), for whom we do not have suitable provision at the moment.

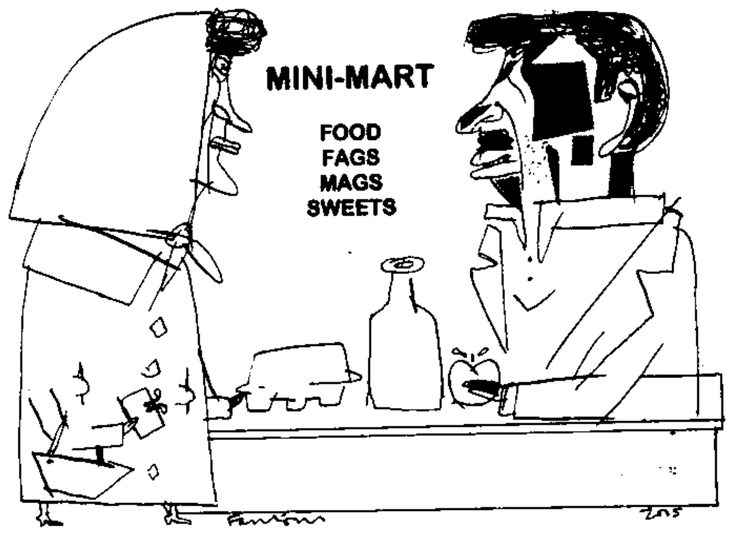
It cannot be right for local education authorities to ignore these changes. Closure of Chartfield will allow us to spread the SEN resource which is presently concentrated in a single institution much more widely across our mainstream secondaries. This matches the resource to the children, while helping the mainstream schools to make sure that the bullying which many SEN parents fear (not unjustifiably in some cases in the past) is addressed at source for the benefit of all SEN youngsters in the mainstream schools – precisely the point that Mr Stone makes. Our intention is to use the Chartfield site to build a new Special School to take youngsters with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and complex Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD).

Elsewhere we are also building a base for the secondary age PMLD youngsters who are presently coming up through the primary phase, refurbishing our provision for secondary SLD, expanding our other secondary Special School and building a new base for primary MLD at one of our mainstream primaries. We are also expanding our provision for autism throughout the system.

Yours faithfully,
CLLR MALCOLM GRIMSTON,

Executive Member for Education, Wandsworth Council.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Our hours are nine-thirty to five. Half day Wednesday. Close early Saturday – and we're shut Sundays, Christmas, Easter and Bank Holidays"

MMR...

Sir,

In the Observer of 23 October, I mentioned gently and in passing your role in fuelling the great MMR mania. I opened the next issue of the Eye and saw you had denounced me for drunken ranting. I re-read the piece and noticed you hadn't told your readers what the dispute was about. Pressure on space, no doubt.

For my part, I confess. You've got me bang to rights. There have been times when I have drunk almost as much as your staff.

Now it's your turn. Do you accept that you don't have to be plastered to respect the mountain of evidence that MMR does not cause autism?

Would you advise your readers to forget what they read in the Eye and get their children vaccinated before there is a measles epidemic?

Cheers,
NICK COHEN,

London EC1.

● The *Eye*'s MMR coverage has always stressed the danger of measles and the importance of vaccination and has never urged people not to vaccinate (see *Eyes* passim when sober), but the magazine has also felt that there were sufficient grounds for concern about the MMR vaccine to keep asking questions about it. After all, the Cochrane Collaboration, on whose 2005 report Cohen's piece was based, conducted a similar report in 2002 in which one of its authors, Dr Tom Jefferson, called for better research into the long-term effects of the triple jab and criticised government and health officials for "refusing to listen to people's anxieties" and for "unwillingness to evaluate evidence critically". This was the *Eye*'s position and, interestingly, in 2002, the *Observer* chose to cover the Cochrane Review under the headline, "Most MMR Studies Are Meaningless".

However, the *Eye* did report then (and again now – see In The Back) that the conclusions of the Cochrane Review were that "Exposure to MMR was unlikely to be associated with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis or autism" and that the triple jab was very effective at preventing the three diseases. Ed.

"I wish we'd stayed home and watched the box"

● *On sale now – "Scenes you Seldom See" by Barry Fantoni. Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from private-eye.co.uk* ●

Fallible Foot

Sir,

Paul Foot was generally a very good investigative journalist (and an even better writer). However, he was not infallible and insensitive words like "highest tradition of Paul Foot journalism" are likely to stick in the throats of, say, the families of the late Mrs Hilda Murrell and the late Michael Gregsten, not to mention Valerie Storey, paralysed for life by James Hanratty whose guilt the liberal establishment is still snootily unable to accept, as your predecessor's new book, "My Friend Footy" (for which you give a free plug) shows.

JOHN WEBSTER,

London SW1.

Sir,

Since Paul Foot was so spectacularly wrong about his longest running and most dogged campaign – for the innocence of the rapist and murderer James Hanratty – it is entirely appropriate that an award in his name should be given for the persecution and hounding of Professor Sir Roy Meadow.

DR ROB JOHNSTON,

Northampton.

Sir,

Re ***Paul Foot Award to*** *Daniel Foggo and Charlotte Edwardes of The Sunday Telegraph for exposing BPAS late abortions.*

You set up the Paul Foot awards in memory of a courageous investigative journalist who put his own safety at risk by attacking the powerful, criminal and corrupt. His attitude to people in need was protective, not accusatory. I don't believe he would ever have attacked women who are desperate enough to seek illegally late abortions – and he would have scorned such an easy target anyway.

Almost all abortions were illegal 40 years ago, and since then anti-abortionists have never stopped trying to whittle away the current law. Please don't link his name with this unworthy cause.

JANET WRIGHT,

Via email.

Tabloid moment

Sir,

I particularly enjoyed the exposé in Eye 1144 of the former BBC employee whose marriage broke down, and who went on to have a homosexual relationship. More of this please. In future could we also have some satirical comment on whether the ex-wife was a "minga" or a "stunna". Are there any colour photographs available of her taking her children down to the shops... have any celebrities or sportstars been involved in a "Drugs Shame Shocker" recently... or can the Eye arrange any promotions for readers to holiday in a campsite for under a tenner, etc.

Still a grateful reader,
A. JOHNSTON,

Via email.

Short schrift

Sir,

Thank you for your excellent diary tribute to John Peel. However, to call it a Festschrift is a misnomer. A Festschrift is awarded to someone on their birthday, usually that of their retirement (hence G.E.M. de Ste Croix's memorable comment that it was tantamount to being declared senile by your colleagues).

A memorial publication for the dead – as with John Peel – is a Gedenkschrift, an important distinction underlined by Simon Hornblower in the preface to the 1994 Festchrift of D.M. Lewis, late fellow and tutor of Christ Church, who was awkward enough to die just before publication.

I hope that clears that up.

Fond regards,
RENE LAVANCHY,

London W1.

Sir,

A pedant writes. I feel that HM Queen Elizabeth II choice of "Tales from Topographic Oceans" by Yes to "remember" John Peel by would not be appropriate. He disliked Yes and their style of progressive rock with a vengeance. Which was a shame as I enjoyed both John Peel and Yes.

"Teenage Kicks" by The Undertones would be a far better tribute. Unfortunately I now cannot get rid of an image of HM the Queen, wrapped in a gold cape, miming over a huge bank of keyboards à la Rick Wakeman with Prince Philip on double-necked bass as Chris Squire.

Yours,
DAVID BRIGGS,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"They have now got the grit between their teeth."
KEVIN GALLAGHER, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Metcalfe)

"Leeds is the biggest city of its size in Europe."
GREG MULHOLLAND MP, BBC2
(Trevor Rhodes)

"One bad apple in the dressing room and everything can go pear-shaped."
PAUL MASEFIELD, Star Sports (S.E. Asia)
(Mike Appleton)

"Football has got a nasty habit of biting you straight in the face."
CHARLIE NICHOLLS, Sky Sports 1
(Jenny Carnegie)

"Even if he is executed and becomes a martyr to the Iraqis, I think Saddam can live with that."
CON COUGHLIN, BBC News 24
(John Somers)

SOLUTIONS

"Uniq's Vision is to be the most exciting provider of chilled food solutions to our customers across Europe" – *ready meals*

"The Blue Team: Outsourced Vehicle Movement Solutions" – *car deliveries*

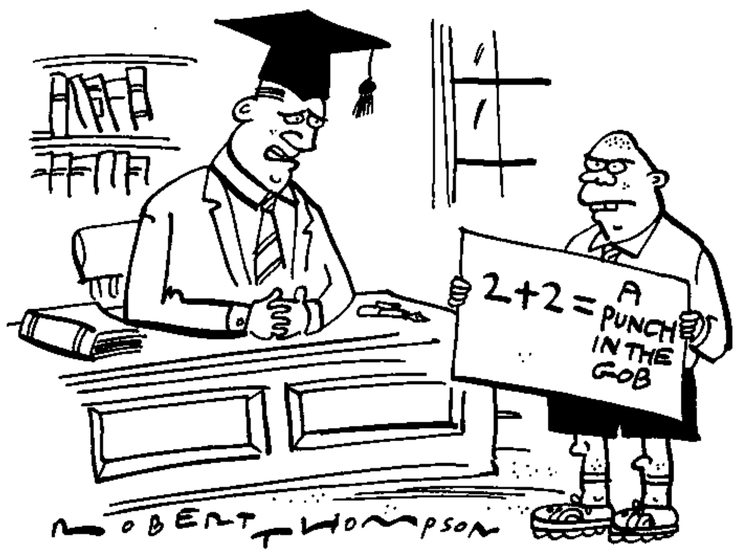
"Integrated Care Solutions (Shropshire): working in partnership to deliver Residential, Day-care and Extra-care solutions" – *nursing homes*

"Clegg: Accommodation Solutions" – *flats*

"Clifford Chance Human Resources Solutions" – *personnel department*

"Apssocks - For All Your Sock Solutions" – socks

All submitted by readers



"Interesting... you say your father taught you that violence is the answer to everything?"

Snow storm

Sir,

Go easy on the Beeb. We know they spend our money as if it is their own, but what happens on C4 News? News from India and Pakistan is adequately covered by the hacks the channel has had in the area for quite some time. Come the Kashmiri earthquake and lo and behold, Jon Snow (whom God protect) is on the scene reading out loud in front of a camera. No sighting of the regulars. Instead of an expensive helicopter, perhaps C4 could have sent Mr Snow's weight in food and water...

Yours,
MIKE MITCHELL,

Hove, East Sussex.

On the Slide

Sir,

Flicking through issue 1144, I happen upon an interesting spot in the Street of Shame section under the heading "Those Tory Tipsters In Full". Well done for bringing to readers' attention how wrong these respected commentators can be. Yet it is not only such distinguished gentlemen of the press who find that their ability to make predictions can be wildly misplaced.

I seem to remember the esteemed Quintus Slide sounding off in Eye 1134 in June this year about who will be in the running and who won't. After reeling off a plethora of names, he decides that the final battle would be between David Davis and Kenneth Clarke – "All the rest is vanity".

Yours etc,
WILLIAM MITCHELL,

Southbourne-on-Sea, Dorset.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Al-Muthanna**

from Our Own Correspondent

AS Remembrance Day looms, coalition troops overseeing reconstruction here in Iraq have been recalling the Second World War and that Sunday afternoon favourite, *Bridge Over The River Kwai.*

Who can forget those back-breaking images of our brave boys building railways in Burma, ordered around at gunpoint by the soldiers of imperial Japan? Certainly not the 450 Australian squaddies currently billeted in western Iraq's forgotten Al-Muthanna province. Their task is not to rebuild shattered infrastructure but to guard and protect a similar number of Japanese troops who are doing the rebuilding.

The Japanese need the Australians because their constitution forbids them to do any fighting, even in a good cause. As the Japanese contingent's commanding officer, Colonel Katsushi Okazaki, admitted: "The Australians provide us with security. Our basic role is reconstruction, repairing bridges, public buildings, water purification centres and schools. Ah, and we have another mission giving medical support."

Okazaki is one of the more bullish Japanese officers. In May, when Iraqis rioted over a pay dispute in the nearby town of Samawa, his predecessor swiftly confined his troops to barracks. This so irritated the Dutch contingent who were then guarding them that they insisted the Japanese get back to work – which they sheepishly did.

Elsewhere, as more Iraqis die in the blood-letting that has followed our "liberation" from Saddam, echoes of a row in the United Kingdom have now reached us. The shenanigans over the "glorifying terrorism" clause in Tony Blair's anti-terror measures caused embarrassment here when it was realised that the law as currently proposed would catch those who used violence against even repressive regimes.

By this token large swathes of our new Iraqi government – many of whom were resident in London during Saddam's pomp – would be guilty of such a crime and liable to prosecution by your authorities.

For example, our new prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, hails from the Da'wa Party which is described by your very own Foreign Office as "the traditional anti-regime Islamic party in Iraq". Da'wa fiercely opposed Saddam when he came to power – it tried to assassinate Tariq Aziz, for example – and in turn it was "ruthlessly repressed".

Saddam himself is currently on trail over the reprisals he ordered following a Da'wa-inspired assassination attempt on him – an act Saddam described as Islamist terrorism.

Da'wa also fought outside Iraq. According to your FCO: "It carried out attacks on Ba'athist targets in the 70s and extended this to a campaign against targets in Kuwait in the 80s." In 1983 and 1985 Da'wa members launched suicide bomb attacks on the American and French embassies in Kuwait and tried to assassinate the Emir of Kuwait. The targets were seen as allies of Saddam.

Our current vice-president, Adel Abdel Mahdi, would fare little better if the "glorifying terrorism" test were applied to him. Before the recent war, his party, the Supreme Council for the Islami Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was based in Tehran and enjoyed Iranian patronage, says the FCO.

Its strength is the "Badr Brigade", "the 10,000-strong military arm of SCIRI" which "is largely made up of Iraqi prisoners of war taken by the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war". Even your Foreign Office admits that: "The party played a major role in the uprising of March 1991 after the Gulf Conflict, though its brutal murder of low-ranking members of the Ba'ath party and the army may have played into Saddam's hands and exacerbated Sunni mistrust of possible Shia rule."

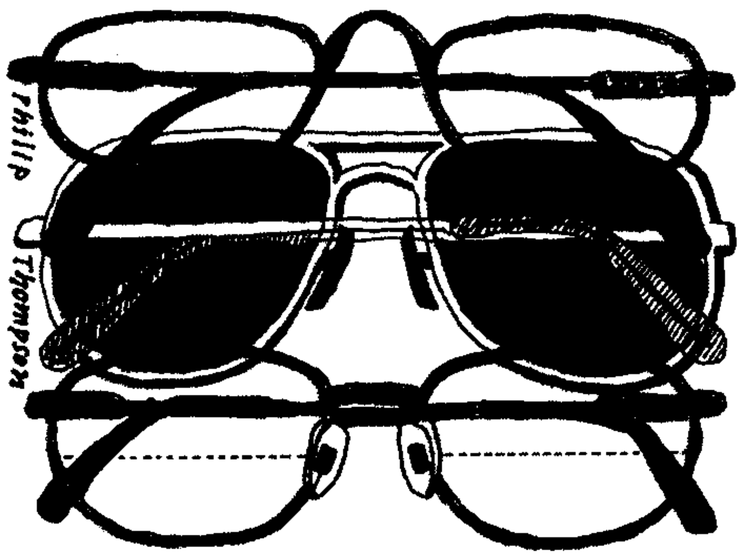
In another move that could be seen as having glorified terrorism, in 2001 the SCIRI publicised details of the assassination of Ba'ath party officials. As your Foreign Office put it: "SCIRI is not claiming direct responsibility for these attacks, but it does approve of them." "Glorifying terrorism" or what?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"When I was in junior high school, I borrowed my friend's spectacles," Toru Nagasawa told police investigators in Kawasaki, "and I found they looked much nicer than my own pair. They felt so good to wear, and I looked so handsome in them, that I wanted to keep them forever, but he demanded them back. So that night, I broke into his locker and stole them, and ever since I have been stealing spectacles, searching for the pair that will fit me perfectly."

Earlier, a police spokesman had described the circumstances that led to the arrest of Nagasawa, a twenty-nine-year-old construction



worker. "This man clearly has an obsession with optical wear, and perhaps a sexual fetish about it too. We were called out to investigate after he had broken into an apartment in the middle of the night, and threatened the resident by asking him 'are you wearing contact lenses? You must take them out and insert them in my eyes.' He had then punched the man in the face because 'you are not responding sincerely to my heartfelt questions,' stole his contact lenses, punched him in the face again, and ran off.

"We tracked Nagasawa to his house in the Miyamae-ku district, and arrested him there. Inside, we found 124 pairs of spectacles and 30 pairs of contact lenses, of every conceivable variety, all carefully labelled, and all stolen. He was unrepentant, but admitted that he has been stealing for over a decade, 'because stolen glasses feel sexy to wear, so much better than shop-bought ones'. We are now investigating his possible involvement in more than a hundred previous reported cases of spectacle theft." *(Yomiuri Shimbun, 30/7/05. Spotter: James Robinson)*

– o –

Sir, In reply to the letter from Miss X (the Smelly Human), I strongly suggest that she gives the following ancient Chinese method a try.

Early each morning, steam two Dim Sum buns (man-tou in Mandarin), and put them to one side until they are just warm. Then place a bun under each armpit, and begin walking in an easterly direction. When the Dim Sum become cold, you can stop walking. After this, throw away the used buns, and return home by another route. Do this every day until your unpleasant body smell disappears. Note that man-tou is not the same as Chinese pau. It has no filling and is available in the frozen food section of supermarkets.

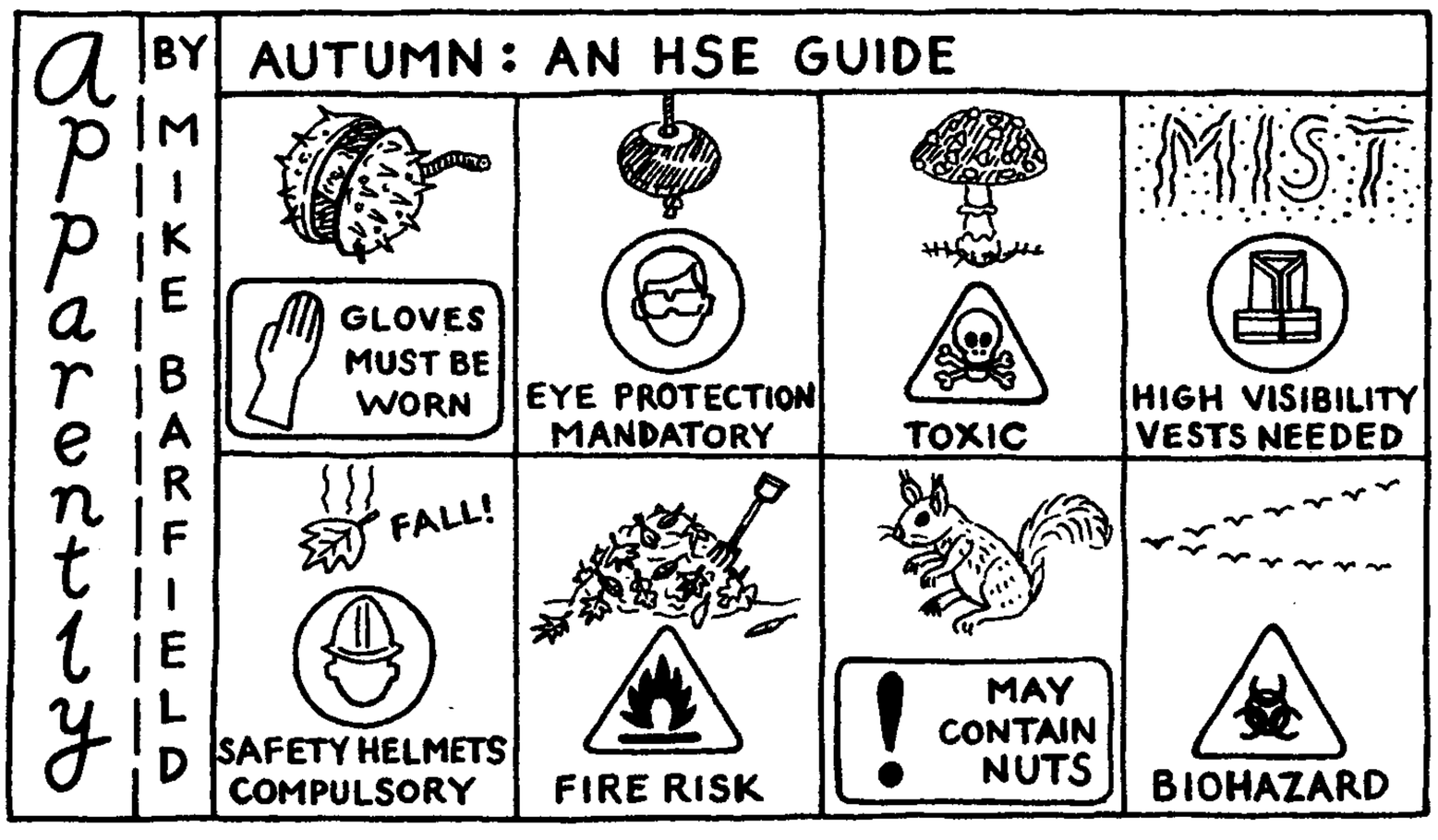
I know of at least two people who have tried this method, and were cured of their B.O. One person used it twelve times and was cured. In the other case, a girl was cured after trying it only once. I strongly urge Miss X to try it at least twelve times, on successive mornings. If she does, I do hope she will let readers know the result of the experiment.

Yours sincerely, Ho Choon Young (a great grandpa). (Sunday Star [Malaysia], 7/8/05. Spotter: Azmi Merican)

– o –

"When the yoga group first approached us," warden Sigbjoern Hagen of the high-security Ringerike jail near Oslo told reporters, "they said they could teach our prisoners how to control their aggression. That sounded desirable, so we agreed to pay them to hold yoga classes for our inmates, and at first these seemed to be going very well. However, the reactions we noted in many of the prisoners who participated soon became completely negative, with symptoms including agitation, aggression, irritability, angry outbursts, mental confusion, difficulty in sleeping, homosexual rape, and attempted murder. So sadly, we've now had to abandon the classes."

A spokesman for the unnamed yoga group later expressed disappointment at the decision. "Yoga originated in India more than 5,000 years ago, and is well-known for its ability to harmonise mind, body, and spirit. Many of the prisoners found it a very positive experience, and it was only a small minority who turned to rape and extreme violence. True, the exercises for the unblocking of psychological barriers did temporarily make some of the inmates more dangerous, but if the authorities had only kept faith, that would have passed eventually." *(Sulekha News, 4/8/05. Spotter: Tom Sandars)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Or, as I had to say to my good friend Mr Blunkett, "goodbye", when, very sadly, he told me that he was going to resign from the PCC.

Let's be quite clear. David did nothing wrong! I'll go further. I'd like to put on record here and now that David is the finest, most upright, most principled, most decent human being it has ever been my privilege to meet on this earth (apart, of course, from myself!).

I hear that some people in the parish are going round saying, "The Vicar's lost his grip and the parish is falling apart". (OK, Mr Marshall-Andrews, I know who you are! Sitting in the bar at the Britannia Arms, drinking round the clock – which, incidentally, you've got me to thank for!)

Well, for your information, I'm not losing my grip in any way whatsoever! And the proof of that is as follows:

● Would someone who was losing their grip twice ask Mr Blunkett to stay on, despite the embarrassment that would ensue? No!

● Would someone losing his grip be pressing on with all his plans for modernising the entire infrastructure of St Albion's, including the launch of the new Walmart-Kwikfit St Albion's Foundation Hospital, Primary School and Personal Finance Centre? Not much grip-losing there, is there?

● Would someone losing their grip be given no fewer than 18 designer watches from Father Silvio Berlusconi, the head of the much-respected Church of the Cosa Nostra in Palermo? I think not!

No, I tell you what I've lost. It's not my grip, I've lost. It is the services of my most decent, loyal, trustworthy and hard-working friend, Mr Blunkett.

A man whose unimpeachable integrity shines before all of us to guide us on the true path that leads to salvation. (Or rehabilitation, as we call it now!)

I wonder how many of the children can

The vicar unveils a new statue in the churchyard. As seen by our local artist Mr de la Nougerede.

remember that story from the Bible about the scapegoat?

No, Tariq, it's not the new film with Wallace and Gromit. Yes, Asbo, I know you'd much rather be watching that than listening to me!

But let me tell you anyway! The scapegoat was an entirely innocent bearded creature who, for no reason, was driven out and stoned to death by members of the tabloid press.

Isn't that a really horrid story, children? Just imagine that poor old goat, who'd done nothing wrong, having to resign from the rest of the goat community, just because, as the Good Book tells us, there was "not a stain of impropriety upon that goat of many colours" (*Letter of Timothy Rice to the Thespians*).

And, I'm quoting that story completely from memory! So, hey, who's lost their grip?

That goat was "Whiter than white", exactly as I prophesied it would be, as long ago as 1997!

So it was never "many-coloured" at all, as certain people keep claiming! Are you still with me, children?

Which brings me to my seventh point. Some old-fashioned people still cling to some very out-dated notions, such as that it is what they used to call "sinful" ("unhelpful", as we would call it today) for members of the PCC to buy and sell shares!

How mad can you get? And I'm the one who is supposed to be losing my grip! Pur-lease! As if! Whatever!

(If you wish to show your support for the vicar, text him now on 077077 or contact the vicarage website on www.stillvicar.com)

And, to my third and most important point of all. People are apparently saying that I am turning into my predecessor, the Rev. Major, by clinging onto my job while everyone around me is getting up to sleazy practices!

Well, all I can say is that, as I said to my wife Norman at breakfast, I am not inconsiderably incandescent at this suggestion, which is in my judgement in no small measure the work of BASTARDS who I have put in my book, oh yes!

Yours,

Tony Major

(age 52¾)

— Salve —

Welcome to Mr Hutton, who has taken Mr Blunkett's place on the PCC. Most of you won't have heard of Mr Hutton or think he is the charming old gentleman who wrote that splendid report saying that Mr Campbell and I had done nothing wrong over the sad death of our local GP, Dr Kelly! He is not that Mr Hutton, but it doesn't matter because he is also a very loyal supporter of everything I have done since coming to the parish, and that's the main thing, isn't it? T.B.

Parish Postbag

Mr Blunkett's Letter To The Vicar

Dear Tony,

Although, as you know, I have never done anything wrong, after our little talk this morning I could smell and feel that it would be a good idea if I was to step down from the PCC.

It has been a great privilege for you to have me as a valued part of your team, and I feel sure that you will soon want to have me back, as you did last time!

With heartfelt thanks,
Your best friend,
David
PS. Sadie sends her love!

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Many of you may have missed a very interesting programme on Saturday on St Albions Foundation Hospital Radio. The vicar made a surprise guest appearance on "Football Focus" and was asked to choose his "Dream Team". the newsletter is delighted to reprint it in full!

Tony's Dream Footy XV

Johnny Wilkinson

Freddie Flintoff — **Ellen McArthur** — **Frankie Detori** — **Bob Geldof**

Alan Milburn — **Ruth Kelly** — **Hazel Blears**

Alastair Campbell — **Rev. Blair (captain)** — **David Beckham** — **Frank Bruno**

Sub: Dame Kelly Holmes

As you can see Tony knows just as much about football as he does about running St Albions!! D.H.

● *On sale now – St Albion Parish News Book Eight "Vicar On The Spot!". Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from private-eye.co.uk* ●

'WHY WE NEED 90 DAYS' – KNACKER SPELLS IT OUT

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

TOP POLICE Chief Inspector Sir Ian Knacker of the Yard today told the Prime Minister that the 90-day detention period for terrorist suspects was "absolutely imperative" if the police were to win the war against terror.

"We at the Met are convinced that nine months is the very minimum that it takes the police to extract a confession from those we suspect of being in our cells."

He continued: "Nine years is a small price to pay for ensuring the safety of the public.

"The alternative," he concluded, "is that we will have to shoot them in the Underground. It is the only way to protect innocent citizens against the possibility of being killed on the Tube."

The Prime Minister immediately backed Knacker's 90-year detention plan. "If this is what the police want, it is surely right that we should agree to it. They know best and it is not the job of politicians to interfere in police matters."

Last Night's Soaps WHAT YOU MISSED

South Westenders

(Int: Fashionable home in Battersea. Ross and Rebekah have been out celebrating at a big party. But Ross has found out Rebekah's guilty secret)

Ross: You slag!

Rebekah: Who are you callin' a slag?

Ross: I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Rebekah: Leave it out!

Ross: It's Blunkett, innit? You've been out wiv Dirty Dave ain't ya?

Rebekah: You don't know nuffink. You're just all mouf you are.

Ross: What's your game then?

Rebekah: I'll see who I like, right?

Ross: I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Rebekah: Shut it!

Ross: Don't tell me to shut it!

(Rebekah punches Ross in the face. Cut to the house nextdoor where nice couple Tom and Jenny are getting worried by these violent scenes)

Tom *(on phone)*: Hello, police... I'm terribly sorry about this, but the ghastly couple next door are having a bit of a domestic. She's the editor of some awful tabloid and he's the yobby one from Eastenders. I don't watch it myself, but Jenny does, she's just here, she can tell you all about it.

Policeman: I don't believe I'm hearing this...

(Cut to police station where Rebekah is being bundled into a cell)

Rebekah: You're makin' a big mistake. You don't know who you're dealing wiv. I've got

friends in high places.

Policeman: I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Rebekah: Tony, Cherie, Rupert, they're all my mates and your job won't be worth nothing when they find out what you done to me. And I know Max Clifford.

Policeman: Blimey, I'd better let you out then.

(Cut to int. Sun editorial office. Next morning. Rebekah is sitting at desk, clutching head and taking an Alka-Seltzer. Rupert Murdoch enters)

Rupert: Strewth! You're drunk, violent and stupid.

Rebekah: Yes, boss.

Rupert: You're a perfect Sun editor. Have a raise!

Rebekah: I don't believe I'm hearing this!

Rupert: Now let me have a look at those page 3 sheilas. Jeez, look at the melons on this one... you'd need a kangaroo's pouch to get them home...

(Credits and silly theme tune)

Cast In Full

Rebekah Wade...Barbara Windsor
Ross Kemp.....Grant Mitchell
Dirty Dave.....Ricky Tomlinson
Dirty Digger.....Barry Humphries

The Tragic Causes Of The French Riots

HA HA HA... serves them right... they had it coming... don't lecture us about immigration... garlic... onions... cheese-eating surrender monkeys... Feu what a scorcher! Geddit!! Ha ha ha...

© All newspapers

EXCLUSIVE TO THE EYE

THE ULTIMATE BORE

By **Sir Crispin Mandarin**

Starting today, Sir Crispin, formerly Ambassador to the Court of the Great Dubya, lifts the lid on the incredible inside story of what went on behind the scenes in the backstage drama of *(That's enough intro. Ed.)*

Among Sir Crispin's sensational claims are the following:

- The war in Iraq was a bit of a cock-up
- Blair supported Bush instead of not supporting him
- Er...
- ...That's it.

Now read on...

TO THOSE of us who really knew about everything, it was quite clear that any invasion of Iraq might well go seriously wrong. Had I been consulted by the Prime Minister, I would have pointed out the obvious pitfalls as well as the advantages of such military action. As it was, Tony Blair resolved at an early stage that the decision to go to war was a matter for him as Prime Minister rather than myself. This was a great mistake as, generally speaking, the Foreign Office are much better at running everything than elected representatives such as Blair.

For example, I well remember the occasion when, as the senior British official in the world, I had to introduce Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to Vice-President Dick Cheney. Cheney, who, contrary to public perception, is intelligent, articulate, incisive and very thin, said, "Ah, Mr Cook, I see you've shaved off your beard".

This could have been a difficult moment, but after years at the diplomatic coalface, I was able to defuse this potentially explosive situation easily.

"Goodness me, is that the time?" I said to Mr Straw and led him away to have a cup of tea.

If only my talents had been recognised earlier, World War Two would never have happened and Tony Blair would still be Prime Minister.

Tomorrow: 9/11 – How it could have been avoided if only I had known about it in advance.

© The Ultimate Bore, 2005.

The Pyramids of Geezer

A TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME

The resignation of David Blunkett marks a sad end to a long and distinguished career of public service... humble beginnings... triumph over disability... leader of Sheffield council... extraordinary grasp of detail... won universal respect... key role in Blair project... immense abilities... regrettable intrusion into his private life... lonely divorcé... unfortunate liaison with married woman... understandable lapse... quite rightly brought back into government... questions of judgement remain... "kiss and tell" blonde... dodgy businessmen... more dodgy businessmen... "will you have my babies"... share scam... filling boots... gross breach of ministerial code of conduct... more gross breaches... appalling scoundrel... quite unfit to hold public office... stupid beard... should have been kicked out years ago... good riddance to bad rubbish.

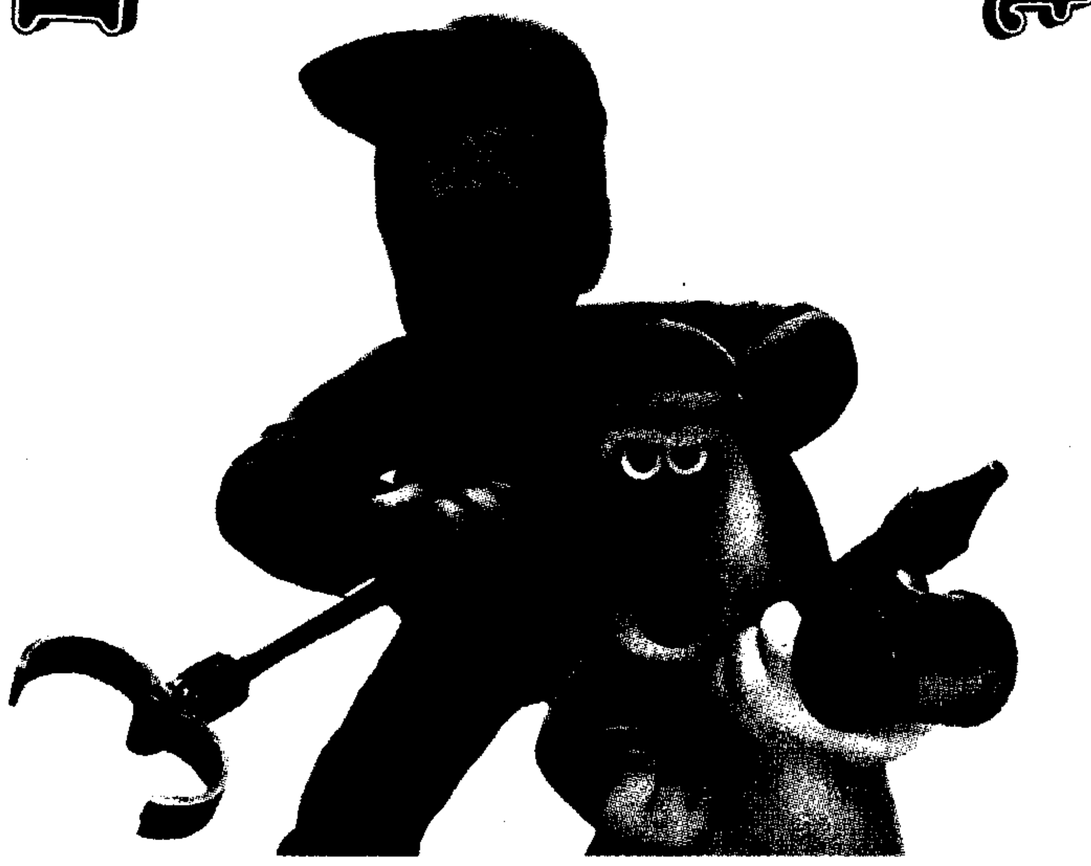
© All newspapers.

"God, can you feed babies with them as well?"

COMING SOON

Blunkett & Gromit

THE CURSE OF THE WERE-DID-IT-GO-WRONG



HILARIOUS comedy from Wallace Blunkett, the crackpot Northern inventor of excuses, and his far more intelligent sidekick, Gromit the dog. Trouble starts when Blunkett falls for posh totty Mrs Kimberly Quinn and makes a fool of himself. Then he does it again and again!

Enjoy Blunkett's loveable catchphrases, including:

● "We're at it like rabbits!" ● "Cracking crumpet, Gromit"

● "Can I join the board of your company, Mr Siddiqi?"

CAST IN FULL

DAVID BLUNKETT ..... Peter Sallis
GROMIT ..... Sadie
MR SIDDIQI ..... Ralph Fiennes
LADY KIMBERLY QUINN ..... Helena Bonham-Carter

EYE RATING: FAMILY COMEDY AT ITS SADDEST!

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY MAIL

THE BRAVERY OF THE DAILY MAIL

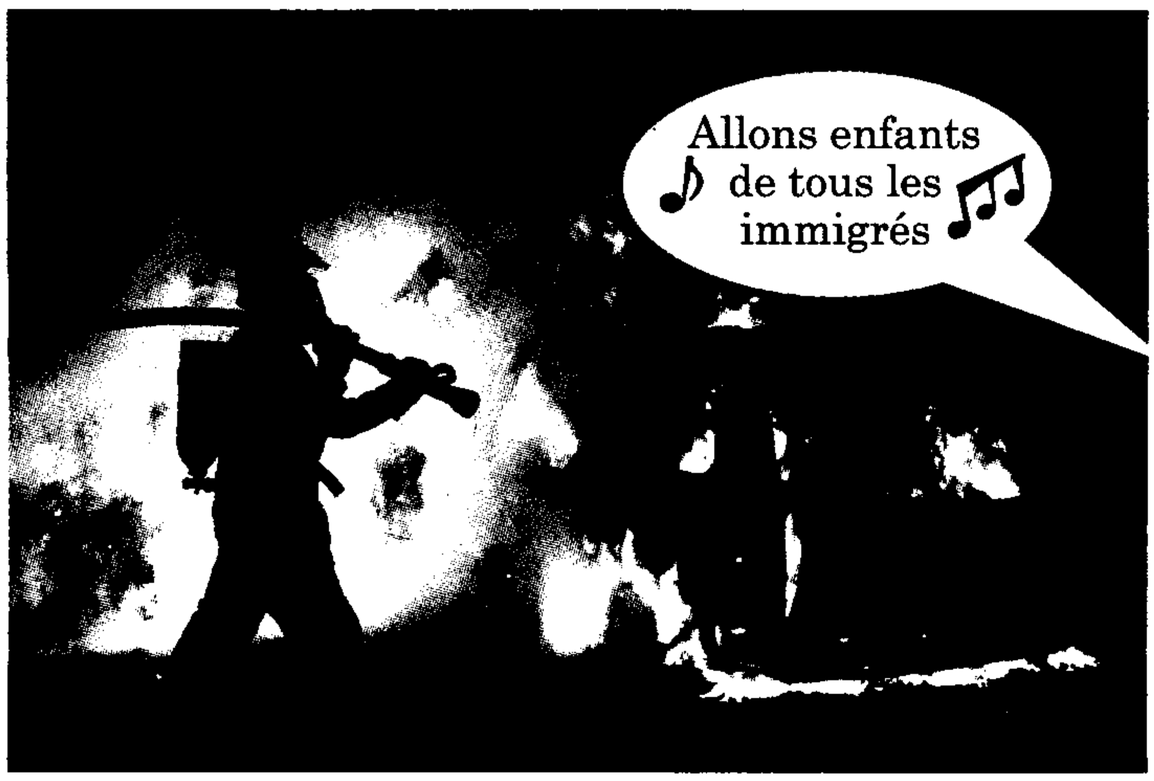
The picture of a haggard-looking Kylie Minogue, having a cup of coffee with her mother in a Paris cafe, after treatment for breast cancer reveals the true bravery of the *Daily Mail*.

Many other papers simply would not have had the guts to print a paparazzi photograph like this on their front page. Particularly when they said that they wouldn't do this again.

Such bravery in the face of public opinion should be an example to newspapers everywhere.

We say – hats off to "Daily", the country's most popular newspaper!

FRENCH NATIONAL ANTHEM



TRAGIC END FOR BEST MATE

by Our Racing Staff **Christopher Bookie and Sarah Sandsdown Park**

THE ever-popular Best Mate was today sent to the knackers' yard following his sudden collapse on what was expected to be his triumphant return to the course.

Said his owner, Mr T. Blair: "Best Mate was loved by nobody at all except me.

Horse of Commons

"It is a great loss but he died doing what he liked doing – going round in circles with someone on his back."

Full Story p. 94

RADIO FOUR

THE ARCHERS

What you will hear in the saga that has gripped the nation

(Cow moos in background)

Emma Grundy: Will, I've just been into Ambridge to buy one of those testing kits from DNA Bioscience...

Will Grundy: Oh yes? And...

Emma Grundy: I think you should know that the baby... it's not yours.

Will Grundy: Oh my god! Don't tell me it's Ed's!

Emma Grundy: No...

Will Grundy: Then who?

Emma Grundy: Yes – it's David Blunkett's.

(Dog barks. Silly theme music plays – Dum-dee-dum-dee-dum-dee-dum, dum-dee-dum-di-da-da.)

(Cont. 94kHz)

The New Eye Game Play Siddiki!

5				
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FILL in the figure you think David Blunkett was going to make from "Businessman" Tariq Siddiki!!

WHY I HATE A.A. GILL

by England

Bad tempered, vindictive, impatient, ranting, cruel, moaning, these are just some of the unpleasant characteristics that define A.A. Gill. Don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are A.A. Gill, but I just hate him. All that disguising unhappiness beneath a façade of humour shows that his bottled-up fury at *(cont. p. 94)*

Extracted from the book 'Why Is This In Print?' by England.

That Honorary Degree Citation from the University of Haifa In Full

SHALOM ET SALUTAMUS DAVIDIUS BLUNKETTUS CELEBRATUM MINISTERIUM BRITTANNIAE PRO LABOR ET PENSIONES APPOINTMENTUM IMPERATORIS ANTONINUS BLAIRUS AD MMV ET QUONDAM DOMUS SECRETARIUS STRINGEMUPPISSIMUS SED UN-FORTUNATER LEGOVERUS SCANDALUS MAGNATUS CUM BIMBONA AMERICANA KIMBERLEIA QUINNA ET PATER FILIUS DISPUTATUS QUOQUE PROCURAVIT VISA CELERERRIMA PER NANNIA FILIPINA ET ALTERO SCANDALUM CUM LEGOVERA BIMBINA PEROXIDIA AMICA MAXI CLIFFORDENSIS ET FREQUENTAVIT DISCONE NOCTURNO APPELLATA ANNABELLI ET RECEPIT PECUNIAS IRREGULARIAS EX CONSORTIO DIRIBONUCLEICACIDUS (DNA) CONTRA CODUM MINISTERIUM SED, EHEU, FINALITER DISMISSUS EST EX CABINETO AB IMPERATORE TONIO BLAIRIO (VIDE SUPRA), DUX UNIVERSEA ET OMNES GALACTICORUM, ET RETIRAVIT AD SHEFFIELDUM CUN CANE NIGRO LABRADORENSIS FIDELIUS NOMINE SADIA. GAUDEAMUS ET BONUS RIDDANCIUS AD GARBAGIUM MALUM.

© University of Haifa (formerly Oranges 'R' Us of Jaffa).

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Mary Wimbush: actress and three-time star of *The Archers*

So. Farewell
Then Mary Wimbush,
Long-running voice in
The Archers.

I am not a
Regular listener
Myself
But Keith's mum tells
Me that you were
Elsie Cratchet in the
1950s, then Lady
Bonham-Strawberry
In the 1970s.
And, more recently,
Mrs Ludmilla
Starborgling,
Mother of
Jasper.

All together now –
Dum-di dum-di dum-di-
Dum. Dum-di-dum-
Di-da-da.

E.J. Pargeter-Thribb

PS: I gather that you / were once the live-in partner / of my fellow bard, / Louis MacNeice. / Some poets have all / the luck.

FOR SALE 30+ Aviary birds incl.Cockatiels,canaries, Foreign Finches,Kakariki Java`s,Quails £120(Owners ill health forces sale)

County Times

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Birds has issued a statement on its position in relation to avian influenza.

The Times

the PREMIERSH*TS
UTD ARE OBVIOUSLY MISSING KEANE, WHAT'S THE LATEST NEWS?
SIR ALEX
WELL WE HAD TO DO A BIT OF RECONSTRUCTION...
BUT HOPEFULLY HE'LL GET HIS HEAD THROUGH IT NOW
HOME CHANGING ROOM

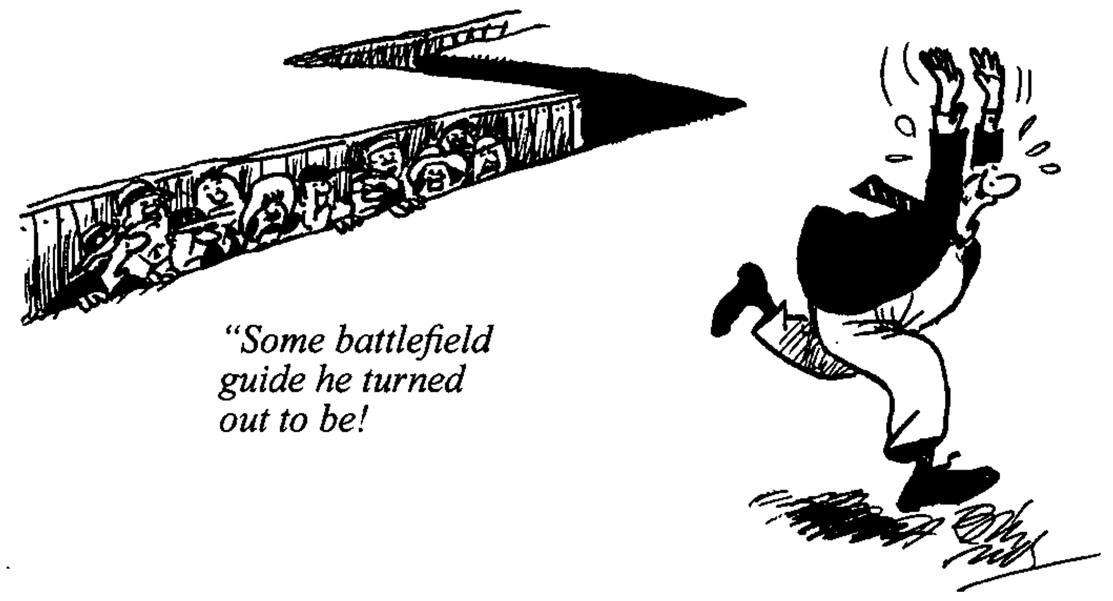
CHARLES AND CAMILLA VISIT 'GROUND ZERO'

by Our Royal Staff **Lady Antonia Holden**

PRINCE Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles have said it was a humbling experience to visit the site of America's worst catastrophe, the Bush Presidency.

"Nothing can really prepare you for seeing 'Ground Zero', or the Oval Office as it's also known, at close hand," a clearly shaken Prince told reporters afterwards. "This place really brings into focus just what wickedness lurks in the heart of men."

Charles and Camilla later joined in a minute's silence to remember Lewis 'Scooter' Libby who gave his career so that thousands of American troops could die in Iraq.



"Some battlefield guide he turned out to be!

That Washington Royal Menu in full

Amuses-Bushes

— ❋ —

Thick American Waffles

— ❋ —

Trout (Heavily Smoked)

Mature Game Bird On A Bed Of Spicy Sauce

— ❋ —

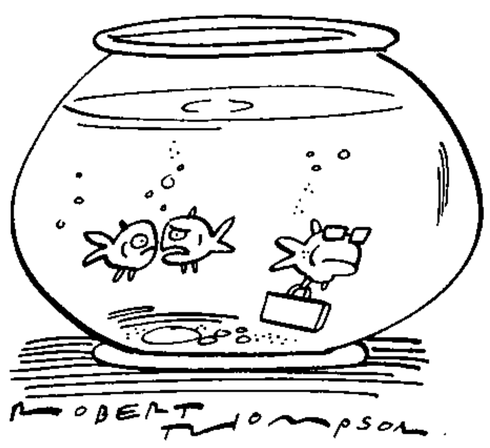
Steak Diane (off)

Iraq Of Lamb, Flambéed In Oil

Jugeared Heir

— ❋ —

Not-Queen Of Puddings



"Are you sure we need an independent financial advisor?"

LATE U.S. SUPREME COURT NEWS

THE Republican Party has welcomed George Bush's latest nomination for the Supreme Court, Judge Attila the Hun.

"We would, in an ideal world, have preferred someone whose politics were slightly to the right of Attila the Hun, but we will accept this nomination," said a senior Republican *(cont. p. 94)*

'OFFENSIVE' STAMP TO BE WITHDRAWN

'We're sorry' say the post office

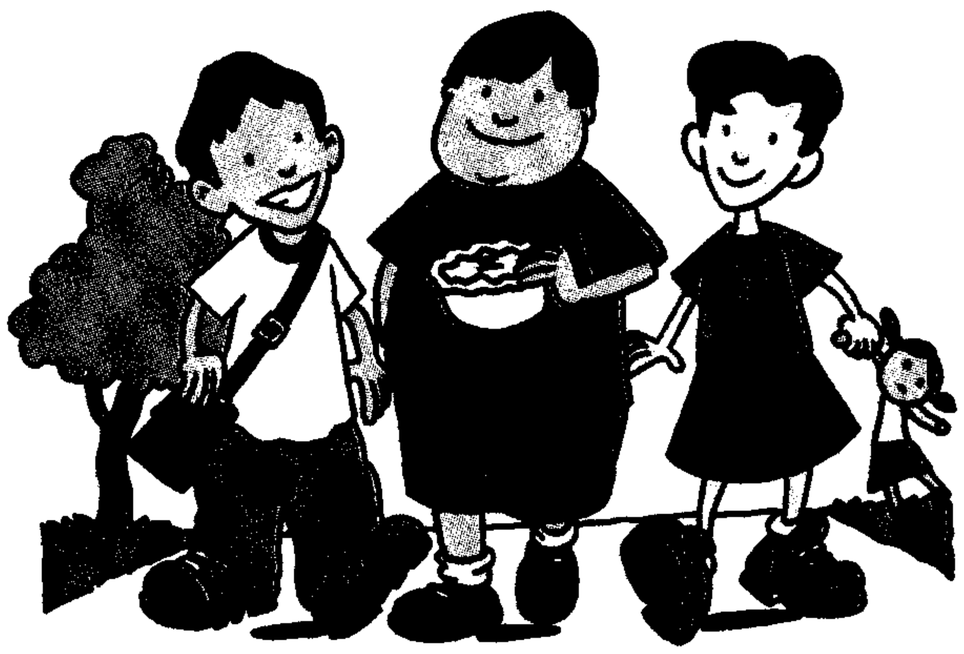
BY OUR POST OFFICE STAFF PHIL ATTELY

A FURIOUS row erupted yesterday over the Post Office's plan to issue a Christmas Stamp depicting the Infant Christ in the arms of his mother Mary

Said the Archbishop of Canterbury, head of Britain's 25-strong Christian community,

"It is an outrage to foist an outdated and culturally imperialistic system of Christian iconography on all users of the postal service, most of whom will be deeply offended by what they see as *(cont 94p stamp for all postal items for Kiritekanawa, formerly the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands)*

Now from the creators of **Janet And John** comes **Tony And Ruth And John** – The Easy-To-Read Education White Paper In Full



Tony wants reform. Ruth wants reform. Tony and Ruth want reform. John doesn't want reform. Tony wants John to be quiet. Ruth wants John to be quiet. Ruth wants John to be quiet. Tony and Ruth want John to be quiet. John says, "Fook off yer poncy public-school boogers!"

When you can read this White Paper you can go on to Reading Stage 2 – **Tony blames Ruth for the abject failure of his government to improve educational standards over the last eight years.**

GREAT SUN HEADLINES THAT SOMEHOW FAILED TO BE PRINTED.

NO 94.

IT'S THE 'ED 'ITTER OF THE SUN!

Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas, Heir of Sorrows,* and *Born To Be Queen Consort.*

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla have been invited on an important Royal tour to the USA, as guests of the most powerful man in the world.

Now read on...

"DON'T worry, old thing, it's all going to be fine!" Charles placed a reassuring hand on Camilla's trembling shoulder, as their armour-plated stretch limousine purred along Watergate Avenue towards the world-famous White House. "They love us here. Just you wait and see!"

Camilla felt happier, and turned to wave through the window at a large, black lady on the 'sidewalk' , who waved a placard reading 'Bush Murderer'.

Charles was now in full flow, as he explained to his bride the finer points of the American constitution.

"You see, Mater is actually head of state, which is why, as her representative, I have to meet President Bush, who is also head of thingie. So we're really on equal terms."

"Yeah, quite right, Chazza," said Camilla distractedly. "Is what I'm wearing okay? I mean, does this hat go with the shoes?"

Charles, who was by now gazing admiringly at the resplendent pillars of the new Clinton Memorial, at the junction of Lewinsky and 69th, replied automatically, "You always look wonderful in red, darling".

"Actually, it's blue, Chazza."

"Is it? These tinted windows make it rather difficult to see. Still, it's wonderful weather, isn't it...?"

"IT'S wonderful weather, isn't it?" welcomed the President, in his homely Texan drawl, his wife Laura at his side.

Turning to Camilla, he said, "And it's a very special honour to have you here, Princess, whom our entire nation has taken to their hearts."

Camilla flushed with pride at the unexpected warmth of his greeting, and laughed nervously.

As the party strolled over the beautifully manicured White House lawn, lined with stately Condoleezza trees, clad in their most glorious autumnal hues, reds, golds, yellows, reds, golds *(Get on with it, Ed.)*, the band of the Guantanamo Bay Irregulars struck up with the theme tune of *'The King And I'*.

"It's the national anthem of England-land, Your Majesty," explained the President, "in honour of your good self and your lady princess." Charles smiled diplomatically, "Yes, well, er, sort of".

Everybody laughed at the President's quaint way of putting things, and Camilla relaxed. It was going much better than she had dreamed. How well they were getting on.

Now Mrs Bush took Camilla by the arm and led her confidingly towards a little group of waiting photographers.

"We're going to have our picture taken. But you don't need me to tell you all about that, ma'am." The First Lady winked knowingly. "Why, you must have been on more magazine covers than anybody in the whole wide world!"

Had she? Camilla thought back. Well, yes, it was true that she had been on the front of *Horse and Hound* in 1985, with her friend Jemima Ricketson-Hatt. And more recently she had graced the cover of the August edition of the Tetbury Parish News, giving away the prizes at the Highgrove Organic Flower Show.

As the photographers concluded their business, the President genially invited Charles and Camilla to "step inside where we have some light refreshments after your long journey from Buckingham Castle".

The hero of Baghdad led them into the famed Betty Ford Cocktail Parlour, where, waiting to greet them, were a galaxy of fashionable celebrities.

Camilla recognised most of them at once. Wasn't that Mr and Mrs Sting? And Yoko Ono, beautifully turned out in a silk kamikazi boiler suit? And the distinguished-looking bald man? Wasn't he in Frasier? Or was it Friends? What was his name? How irritating, she would have to ask her new friend George, whom she could see talking animatedly to his wife by the window.

As she came closer, she could quite clearly hear them talking.

"Lawdie, Laura, she's sure aged badly, this lady. The most beautiful woman in the world?"

"And what about her dress sense? My-oh-my, have you seen that red thing she's wearing?"

"It would look better on a horse!"

Camilla turned away, tears starting to her eyes. She could not believe what she was hearing. Yet it was true, all too true.

Where was Charles? She needed him now. He was across the room, talking earnestly to a group including the Vice-President, Mr Cheney, Mr Rumsfeld, the much-admired Secretary of State for Defence and Mr Rove, known throughout the land as 'The President's Brain'.

She stumbled towards them, Mr Bush's words still ringing in her ears, "Better on a horse..."

As Camilla arrived at her husband's side, he was in full flight. "You see, the thing about this global warming thingie, is that you chaps have got to start pulling your weight. I mean, all these ridiculous great cars you all drive around in..."

Camilla's heart sank. Charles was obviously in no mood to listen. She stepped through the French window onto the terrace, where autumn leaves were beginning to fall.

Was that the mocking laughter she could hear again from beyond the grave...

(To be continued)

© Sylvie Krin, the Budget Airline Library

That New 'Are You British?' Test In Full

● **If you want to know the number for directory enquiries, which number do you ring:**
(a) 999; (b) 112; (c) 123; (d) 94949494.

● **Who won the University Boat Race in 1923? Was it:** (a) Oxford; (b) Cambridge; (c) The University of the North Circular (formerly The World of Leather).

● **Is beer sold in:**
(a) gallons;
(b) kilograms; (c) millilitres;
(d) hectares.

● **Does the younger son of a marquess take precedence over the heir to an Irish Baronetcy?**
(a) yes; (b) no; (c) don't know; (d) whatever.

● **Is David Beckham:**
(a) a footballer; (b) a candidate for the Tory leadership; (c) the former secretary of state for work and pensions; (d) the heir to the throne.

● **Who repealed the Corn Laws? Was it:**
(a) John Peel; (b) Emma Peel of the Avengers; (c) Wayne Rooney; (d) the late Thora Hird.

● **Can you spot the odd one out?**
(a) Carry on Doctor; (b) Carry on Nurse; (c) Carry on drawing your social security benefit.

Congratulations: you have scored 0 or under and you are now a British citizen. This makes you a legitimate target to be blown up by a terrorist, and to pay a huge amount of tax, should you decide to work during your stay.

If you do not speak English do not worry you can take this test in the following languages: Inuit, Sanskrit, Tapas and Sudoku.

Mary Ann Bighead

YOU WILL BE SAD to hear that this is the last column I shall be writing for a while, since I have decided to go on a year-long intellectual voyage round the world with my children. Obviously, this means I have to take them out of school, which is something I would normally disapprove of – as a stern Times columnist.

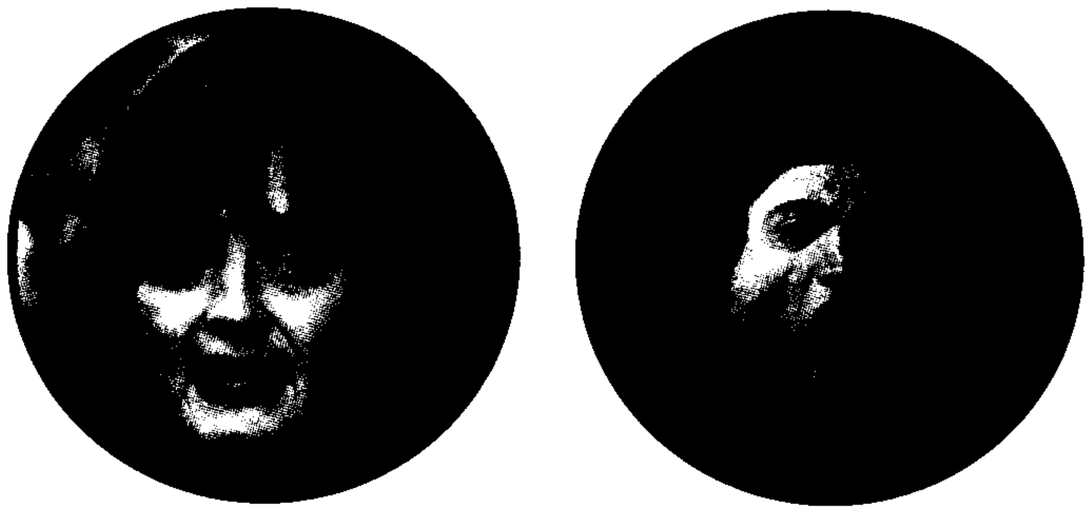
However, my children Brainella (3) and Intelligencia (7) are so fantastically clever and well-adjusted that they can only benefit from the mind-broadening experience of spending so much time with their very clever parents. Any fear that they might fall behind in their studies is easily dispelled by the fact that their father can teach them astrophysics, biochemistry, neurosurgery and nanotechnology, whilst I can cover the arts – history, geography, English literature, the Classics, philosophy, politics, economics and, of course, languages (French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Classical Persian, Mandarin and Swahili!).

Of course, the main thing that I can teach them as we go round the world becoming cleverer and cleverer is ... MODESTY!

©Mary Ann Bighead, The Times.

Mary Ann Bighead's Diary 'Around The World In 80 Columns' begins tomorrow.

Was Cherie's New Hairstyle A Mistake?



Before After

YOU DECIDE

0898 7423471

✔ **YES IT WAS** and you hate her

0898 7423472

✔ **YES IT WAS** and Blair should resign at once

KATE'S BACK...

...AND HER ARSE!

★ More Pix! All Newspapers!

DIARY

ELIZABETH, THE QUEEN MOTHER
by HUGO VICKERS

The moment war broke out, the King and Queen threw themselves into hard work on behalf of a grateful nation. The King learnt how to break into his own boiled egg with a spoon; for the duration of the war he insisted upon doing the job himself, brushing aside all offers of assistance. Seeing him hard at work at the breakfast table, the Queen would clap her hands together in an expression of delight. "So clever!" she would presently exclaim.

Her own war work was regarded by many as a crucial factor in the Allied victory. "Herr Hitler will not have defeated this great country of ours," she could often be heard saying, "as long as the Royal Family eats up its cream buns." And with a defiant laugh she would stuff another cream bun graciously into her mouth.

She had an especial talent for friendship. She took everyone on their own terms, and was as happy to be entertained by a duke as by a dustman, in fact much happier.

She introduced an element of fun wherever possible. For her, there was satisfaction in knowing that by her mere presence she could bring intense pleasure to a room*. To those she encountered, she gave much. It always greatly amused her to watch as her old friend Ruth, Lady Fermoy, would sit on the floor in front of her, her hands in the air and her tongue out. "I rather think Fido is in need of a reward!" she would exclaim with an infectious giggle – she was suffering from a bout of catarrh at the time – before popping a Good Boy doggie biscuit into Lady Fermoy's wide-open mouth.

She had the unique ability to say the right thing at the right time. On one memorable occasion, Osbert Sitwell asked her if she would care for another glass of champagne. In an instant, she held out her champagne flute and exclaimed, "Fill it up!" Her fellow guests remain convinced that this was not a 'prepared' remark, but a genuine 'ad lib'.

"With just three short words, she managed to transform that room!" recalled Norman Hartnell. "It was the most perfect display of wit and grace any of us had ever witnessed." Barely, fifteen minutes later, possibly aided by the champagne, the Queen Mother broke wind. "The most wonderful thing about it was that she 'blew off' to the tune of 'Land of Hope and Glory', which of course set us all at our ease," recalled the Duchess of Albermarle.

Others present recall an intense perfume of lavender and hibiscus filling the room at that moment. "It was the most perfect display of breaking wind any of us had ever witnessed," Ruth, Lady Fermoy, wrote in a letter to the author**.

The Queen Mother had a keen appreciation of art. "Had she ever lifted a brush, I have not the faintest scintilla of doubt she would have proved more than a match for Constable or Gainsborough," wrote Sir Roy Strong in his memoir, Dearest Darling Mumsie (John Murray, 2004). "But instead we, her people, were her true palette. She loved to mix us all up, then slap us all onto her canvas before getting someone to clear it away."

She displayed, too, a deep love of literature***, often getting through two or three books a year. "She was surely the most sensitve reader the world has ever known," recalls Lord St John of Fawsley. "She always insisted on starting at the top left hand corner of a page, and working her way down to the bottom right hand corner, and going through exactly the same process with each page." Sometimes she would tear out and eat the page she had just finished reading, but only if she was feeling peckish, and always with the most consummate grace.

It has been erroneously suggested that the Queen Mother held The Duchess of Windsor in low regard. Nothing could be further from the truth. She always took a Christian view of the The Duchess, regarding her as the woman taken in adultery. In a characteristic gesture, she even went so far as to send her a small packet of supermarket own-brand digestive biscuits**** as a token of her good wishes in the December following the Duke's death. "A joint Christmas and birthday present," read the inscription, written personally by an aide. "Invoice enclosed."

"It was the most perfect display of generosity I ever witnessed," recalls a close friend of the Queen Mother. She could have given her chocolates, but she knew how the Duchess kept a close eye on her figure, so she ate them all herself. "Always such a treat!" she exclaimed delightedly, tearing away the crinkly dividing paper to reveal the layer beneath.

Since the death of HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, there have been many moves afoot for the Vatican to recognise her as a saint. There have been a number of reports of miracles to support the growing call for canonisation. One senior member of her staff recalls seeing her right hand continuing to wave to passers-by a full three days after her death. Another remembers spotting tears fall from a box of Bendicks Bittermints that sat disconsolately by her death bed. Ordinary members of the public maintain that, viewed through a telescope, her familiar face can be seen beaming from the sun, leading to increased pressure on the Prime Minister to rename the sun, "Elizabeth, the Queen Mother", in her honour.

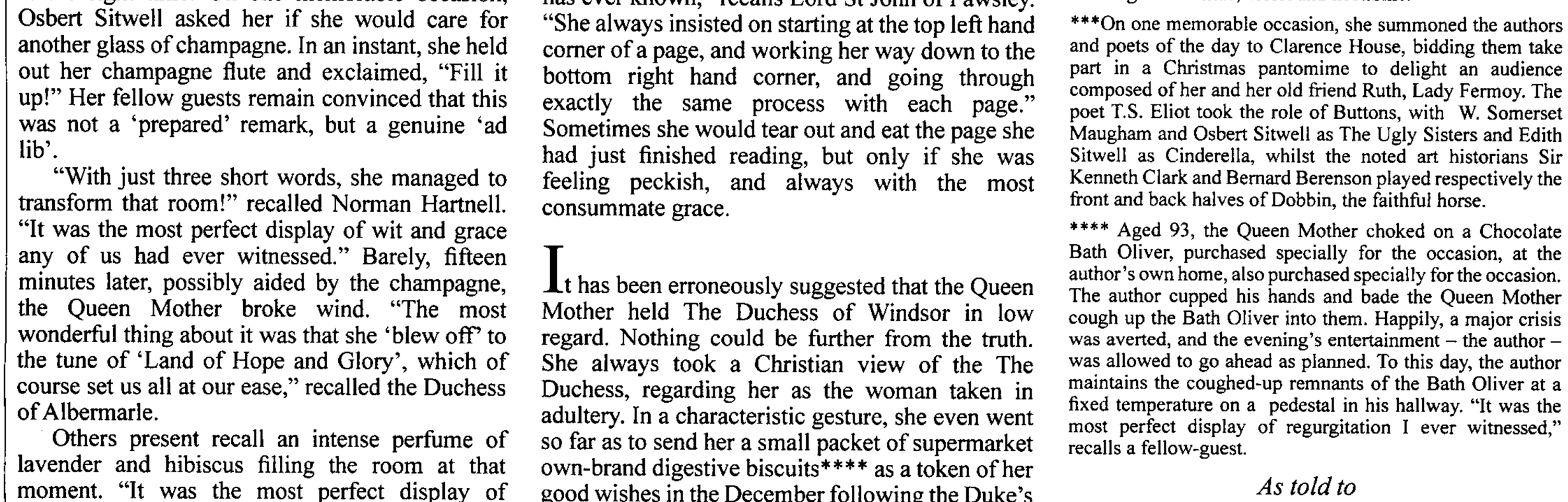
* In 1973, 1974, 1981 and twice in 1992 I myself experienced violent orgasms as she walked into the room. I was not alone. Her Private Secretary, Sir Martin Gilliat, would make a point of always being at hand with a box of luxury paper tissues as she entered any roomful of admirers. Sir Roy Strong was once heard gasping, "Yes, yes, YES!" before collapsing in an exhausted heap as the Queen Mother arrived at the National Portrait Gallery to view a newly-acquired miniature by Holbein in June, 1972.

** Perhaps influenced by a 70th birthday fly-past by the Red Arrows earlier in the year, the Queen Mother entertained her guests at Glamis Castle to a similar display after dinner, employing a dye composed of her trademark pastels – a winning mix of lilac, violet and nectarine.

***On one memorable occasion, she summoned the authors and poets of the day to Clarence House, bidding them take part in a Christmas pantomime to delight an audience composed of her and her old friend Ruth, Lady Fermoy. The poet T.S. Eliot took the role of Buttons, with W. Somerset Maugham and Osbert Sitwell as The Ugly Sisters and Edith Sitwell as Cinderella, whilst the noted art historians Sir Kenneth Clark and Bernard Berenson played respectively the front and back halves of Dobbin, the faithful horse.

**** Aged 93, the Queen Mother choked on a Chocolate Bath Oliver, purchased specially for the occasion, at the author's own home, also purchased specially for the occasion. The author cupped his hands and bade the Queen Mother cough up the Bath Oliver into them. Happily, a major crisis was averted, and the evening's entertainment – the author – was allowed to go ahead as planned. To this day, the author maintains the coughed-up remnants of the Bath Oliver at a fixed temperature on a pedestal in his hallway. "It was the most perfect display of regurgitation I ever witnessed," recalls a fellow-guest.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


IT SEEMS TO START EARLIER AND EARLIER EVERY YEAR, DOESN'T IT?
AND GETS TACKIER AND MORE COMMERCIAL TOO...
IT'S JUST AN EXCUSE FOR SHOPS TO SELL STUFF THESE DAYS... IT'S MATERIALISM GONE MAD...
PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE TRUE MEANING OF WHAT SHOULD BE A SACRED FESTIVAL HAVEN'T THEY?
'FRAID SO...
SHOP
I DIDN'T EVEN CELEBRATE HALLOWEEN THIS YEAR. AND I'M A DEVOUT PAGAN...
I'D FORGOTTEN YOU WERE STILL INTO BLACK MAGIC...

Literary Review

Second coming

Memories of My Melancholy Whores

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

(Cape, £10)

THERE are two main career paths open to senior international novelists who want to keep on practising their craft. The first, in cases where the writer isn't quite distinguished enough to avoid being thrown out into the street by a cost-conscious publisher, involves a loss of temper. The *izdat* editions of one's work courtesy of small independent firms. In case number two, on the other hand, the regrettable consequence is usually a swirl of vanity projects: wardrobes full of old book reviews busily unpacked and crammed between hard covers; or embarrassing, wafer-thin novellas. In this second category undoubtedly repose the 115 large-print pages of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Memories of My Melancholy Whores.*

Dear me, it must be all of 40 years since that first surging tide of South American magical realism sped eagerly along the Gulf Stream towards the chilly waters of the north Atlantic. Those swarms of multi-coloured butterflies, those centuries of solitude and gibbering jungle fauna – *how* we relished them, and *what* an incalculable havoc they wrought (Rushdie, Kundera and others one could mention) on the Western novel, previously a rather staid affair in which the characters did what could plausibly be expected of them, the language had the inestimable advantage of describing the objects to which it was attached and there wasn't a talking jaguar in sight.

Four decades on from these rhapsodical explosions, Garcia Marquez's new one may be taken to represent the fag-end of an increasingly decadent tradition. An anonymous 90-year-old, veteran reporter on the *El Diario de la Paz,* decides to allow himself "the gift of a night of wild love with an adolescent virgin". An obliging bawd duly fixes him up with doped 14-year-old Delgadina, whose succulent outlines he lubriciously appraises ("Her newborn breasts... appeared full to bursting with a secret energy that was waiting to explode" etc.) Despite having previously endured the stirrings of a desire "so urgent that it seemed like a message from God", our man can't bring himself to proceed. Instead, declaring himself finally enraptured after a lifetime of paying for it, he potters off to examine the nature of his inner self, anatomize his obsessions and devote his newspaper column to the glories of love.

Bless. In its '70s and '80s heyday, magic realism typically got by on a combination of hot sex, high culture and portentous language. *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* has all these desiderata in spades. An early scene finds our caprine narrator set suddenly aflame by a rear-view of his domestic servant Damiana. What does a magical realist do in such circumstances? Why, "overcome by irresistible excitement, I pulled her skirt up in back [*sic*], pulled her underwear down to her knees, and charged her from behind."

Happily there is lots of concert-going and bedazzlement at the hands of Wagner, Debussy and co. to compensate for these base lusts, not to mention some dangerously loopy accounts of repeat visits to admire Delgadina's recumbent form ("Blood circulated through her veins with the fluidity of a song that branched off into the most hidden areas of her body and returned to her heart purified by love.")

We are all grown-up people here, and the lustre of both author and publisher should not debar us from asking: who on earth managed to kid Jonathan Cape into subsidising this overheated Colombian *Lolita,* or persuade the *Guardian* so extravagantly to serialise it? Some years ago Garcia Marquez's fellow Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul caused a minor sensation over lunch at an Italian literary festival by suggesting – no, insisting – that the entire Castilian literary tradition was a write-off. *All of it*? Someone incredulously inquired. *Even the South Americans?* Oh yes, Naipaul confirmed, all of it. We giggled at the time, but these days the old boy seems to have a point.

Books & Bookmen

■ FULL-PAGE adverts appeared in the British press last week promoting an authorised biography of the Saudi billionaire Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz al Saud. At first glance it looked like an exercise in vanity publishing. But the ads carried the logo of HarperCollins.

Even HarperCollins's most successful authors don't get such lavish promotions. So why would the publisher do it for a businessman whose name is scarcely known to the British public – and whose hagiography seems unlikely to sell more than a handful of copies to ordinary readers, despite the advertising blitz? Come to that, why is HC publishing this worthless book at all?

The diarist in the *Independent*'s book pages was equally puzzled. "It's not clear," he wrote, "whether the prince is a business associate of Rupert Murdoch, whose News Corp owns HarperCollins." *Au contraire*: it's very clear indeed. Until recently Prince Alwaleed owned 3 percent of the non-voting shares in News Corp, but in September he increased his holding to 5.5 percent of the voting shares – just in time for the AGM in New York on 21 October, at which irate investors were threatening to vote some of Murdoch's cronies off the board and refuse to sanction pay rises for directors.

Interviewed by *Fortune* on 2 October, the prince explained why he had raised his stake. "Our move is pro-Murdoch. We approve of his strategy and approach." Especially, no doubt, his strategy for producing gushing biographies of Saudi tycoons. By happy coincidence, *Alwaleed: Businessman, Billionaire, Prince* was published by HarperCollins branches all over the world three days before the crucial AGM. Sure enough, at the meeting Prince Alwaleed voted his shares in support of Murdoch on every resolution – which, combined with the Digger's own stake, was enough to see off the malcontents.

But it seems a vanity-publishing deal may not be reward enough. "We will be discussing having News Corp invest in Rotana, our TV and media company here in the Middle East," the prince revealed in his *Fortune* interview. "Mr Murdoch's DirecTV will be carrying Rotana, to broadcast its programming to Arab-Americans in North America. I recently met Murdoch in New York City and told him: 'You are in America, Australia, Europe, Asia – why not the Middle East?'"

We have been here before. Ten years ago, when he was trying to expand his Star TV operation into China, Murdoch paid $1m for the English-language rights to an unreadable hagiography of Deng Xiaoping, written by Deng's daughter, while also discouraging his media outlets from drawing attention to China's appalling human rights record. (Hence the dropping of Chris Patten's book *East and West* by HarperCollins.) Given the militantly pro-Israel and anti-Arab stance of some Murdoch newspapers and TV stations, an expansion into the Middle East might require a nimble political U-turn. Given his past record, however, he shouldn't find it a problem.

■ *SOCIOLOGY students who paid £18.95 for* Sociology in Scotland: An introduction, *compiled by a team of academics for Unity Publications Ltd, will learn that the First World War took place from 1814-1818, that the attacks on the World Trade Center took place in 2000 and that Donald Dewar was first minister until 2001 (despite dying in 2000).*

Students have been warned against relying on the textbook, which was on numerous reading lists at the start of this term, as it is peppered with many other silly mistakes. Unity has promised to produce an errata sheet to correct the errors in the next edition and that "there is absolutely no way that students would fail or be disadvantaged in a sociology exam or other assessment at any level as a result of some numerical errors of the kind in the text".

Meanwhile, Unity is continuing to market its textbooks as "reliable, valid and exciting educational materials".

■ WHEN US publisher Sterling, owned by bookseller Barnes & Noble, announced that it was to sell directly into the UK market, chief operating officer Marcus Leaver took the opportunity to blame the company's previous poor UK showing on the sales representation supplied by Chrysalis Books.

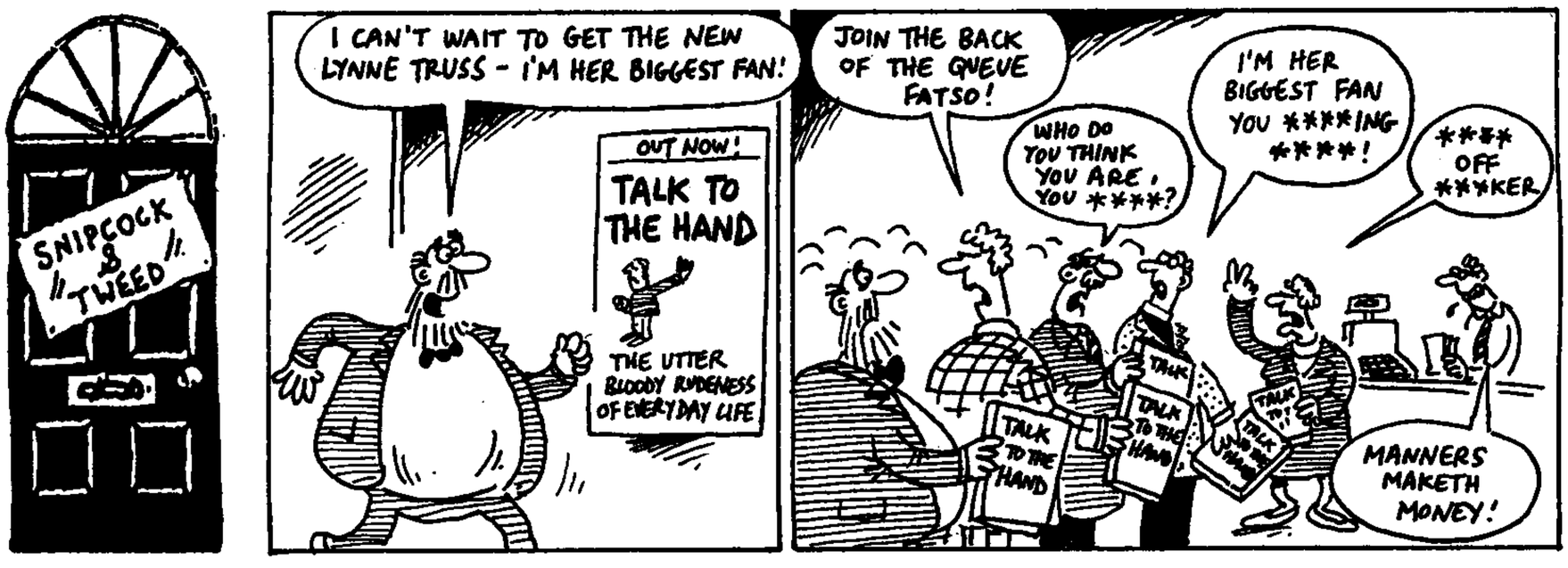
The MD of Chrysalis Books until this January was... Marcus Leaver. He now admits that his former company should have flogged 10,000 of Sterling's *Cosmopolitan Kama Sutra* rather than the 2,000 it managed, but are his new employers not wondering why he didn't have this inspiration at the time?

■ *HMV now has acceptances from 65.7 percent of Ottakar's shareholders for its proposed takeover of the bookseller, but it isn't over until the fat lady (aka the Office of Fair Trading) sings – expected to be in mid-November.*

There's still no indication of the tune the OFT will choose to warble, and both sides remain confident of victory. The HMV bid is conditional on the OFT deciding not to refer it to the Competition Commission.

Such an outcome would leave a nasty crimp in the HMV balance sheet in the run-up to Christmas and reduce the payday for Ottakar's goggle-eyed shareholders, but would be better news for just about everybody else.

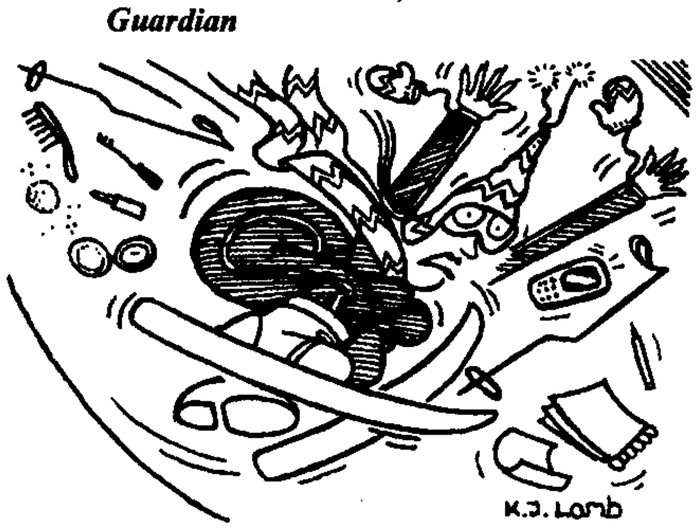
'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
I CAN'T WAIT TO GET THE NEW LYNNE TRUSS - I'M HER BIGGEST FAN!
OUT NOW!
TALK TO THE HAND
THE UTTER BLOODY RUDENESS OF EVERYDAY LIFE
JOIN THE BACK OF THE QUEUE FATSO!
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, YOU ****?
I'M HER BIGGEST FAN YOU ****ING ****!
**** OFF ****KER
TALK TO THE HAND
MANNERS MAKETH MONEY!

Pseuds Corner

I maintain that the best writing about QPR – and possibly about football – was a piece I commissioned from [John] Tilbury for Vogue. It was a musicological analysis of the descending minor third in the "Rodney!" chant that QPR fans of the early 70s sang for Rodney Marsh, based on the differences in the chant when QPR were winning and when they were losing.

MICHAEL NYMAN,
Guardian



I don't know about you, but I always find my curiosity about the nature of enduring love is at its most piquant when I've just come off a simulated downhill skiing machine.

CAITLIN MORAN,
The Times

"There has always seemed something grim to me about Mary McCarthy's dogged insistence on remaining angry for 40 years," the literary critic James Wood wrote recently. By the same token, there has always seemed something unfeasibly heroic about Sarah Lucas's determination, still going full-tilt at the age of 43, to live life at the pitch of a delirious Jimi Hendrix solo – the lewd, endlessly deferred climax of Voodoo Chile, say, when it seems he can never get back from where he's gone.

"I feel so overwhelmingly excited by everything at the minute I can hardly sit still," Lucas says on the phone when we are arranging to meet. To which the only possible reply is: "So what's new?" In her best work, thinking and doing seem to be the same thing, detonating in the same moment. It's why she prefers to work at home, between the washing-up and reading the paper and, probably most profitably, in the heavy hangover hours, when she can make connections between a zinc bucket, a raddled pair of tights and a Fray Bentos bake-in-the-tin steak-and-kidney pie that nobody other than maybe Les Dawson would think to make...

For Lucas, the rush-of-blood moment, the sudden movement and making is the object. She can be equally headlong in her day-to-day life. She recently leapt on Damien Hirst in a crowded bar at the Groucho Club in Soho and wrestled him to the carpet. She said she was going to bite his tongue off and put it in his pocket and afterwards Hirst admitted that there was an instant when he thought she might do it.

GORDON BURN interviews artist SARAH LUCAS, *Guardian*

Prodigies aren't like the rest of us. They are not simply people who are exceptionally talented exceptionally young. No, the point of a prodigy in any discipline is that what normal people find extraordinarily difficult, the prodigy finds extraordinarily simple.

Take Mozart, for example, and [Wayne] Rooney is certainly English football's Mozart... *[continues]*

SIMON BARNES,
The Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Mike Ticher, John Morgan, Rick Bryant, Anthony Head.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NIGER FORGERIES

Second 'source', third rate

THE "Plamegate" affair gripping the Bush administration looks like a thoroughly American dish. But some of the ingredients are definitely British.

US vice-president Dick Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, is in court accused of perjury in the inquiry into the unmasking of CIA agent Valerie Plame. Plame was exposed by the Bush administration in revenge for the actions of her husband, the former ambassador to Iraq Joe Wilson *(see picture)*, who is hated by the Bushites because he investigated and disproved claims made before the Iraq war that Saddam was trying to import uranium from Niger as part of a supposed WMD programme.

No one yet knows how this Gordian knot will unravel, but the ultimate reason for President Bush's difficulties are the false claims that Iraq was secretly buying uranium from Niger – a claim that was prominent in the British government's dossier on Iraqi WMDs.

As *Private Eye* readers, and now the world, knows, the strongest "evidence" for the claims were crude forgeries produced in Italy. Recent reports in the Italian press suggest that Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi and George W. Bush were all relying on the same sources for their claims about Niger uranium; and now the three world leaders are being unceremoniously linked with a bent copper, a break-in and a grubby trade in fake documents.

In 2002 Rocco Martino, a former Italian policeman, handed documents which were purported to be from the Niger embassy in Rome and show an Iraq uranium trade, to Elisabette Burba, a journalist on *Panorama*, an Italian magazine that is part of the Berlusconi media empire. Burba's superiors told her to give the documents to the US embassy. When they were finally handed to the International Atomic Energy Authority, the IAEA immediately spotted that they were unconvincing forgeries.

This deeply embarrassed Tony Blair, who had used the Niger uranium claims in his WMD dossier, and George Bush who announced in a State of the Union speech: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

While Bush's officials have apologised for including these words in the address, the British government claims its information about Niger is quite separate from the Italian forgeries and stands by its claim. Bizarrely, the Butler report, which largely exonerated the Blair government of misbehaviour over its handling of WMD intelligence before the Iraq war, goes out of its way to say that Bush's claims about Niger uranium were "well founded". Thus did Butler exonerate Bush for a claim about which the US government has said sorry.

However, a recent series of reports in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* show that British claims about the "separate source" on Niger uranium are not so separate after all. Rocco Martino, the supplier of the fakes, is an ex-policeman who has reportedly been arrested in possession of stolen cheques. However, he is also a former agent of the Italian secret service (SISMI) with links to existing officers. According to *La Repubblica*, SISMI put him in touch with one of its contacts, an elderly secretary in the Niger embassy. The two then stole official Niger letterheads and rubber stamps and concocted the forgeries. Not only was SISMI closely involved in the Niger forgeries, but it was also separately sending official reports about Iraq-Niger uranium trade to MI6 and to the CIA.

The British MP Lynne Jones, Labour member for Birmingham Selly Oak, has persistently pursued the government over Britain's alleged "second source" on Niger uranium; and from among the many contradictory answers given by the government to her questions, she has established that the main "other information" is not *British* intelligence but a report from a foreign intelligence service during 2002. Italian, perchance?

La Repubblica has suggested that Berlusconi, embarrassed by his isolation before the war following an ill-judged speech about the "clash of civilisations", was determined to give Bush a good story about Saddam's WMD. However, while British spooks accepted Italian reports, the CIA station in Rome was deeply sceptical about them. Indeed, the CIA's rejection of the Niger story was confirmed by the US Senate select committee on intelligence and led to the US apology for making the claims.

To get round the disbelieving CIA, SISMI officers who sponsored the forgeries set up a "multi track" approach – preparing official reports for the US and the UK, and making direct approaches via SISMI head Niccolo Polari to Condoleezza Rice and her aides. Hence British claims to have a "second source" (that isn't Italian) are much less impressive. While there appears to be a lot of intelligence about Niger uranium, it is all basically a version of the same Italian fakery.

The British government could easily clear up the matter by confirming whether or not the "second source" is indeed Italian, and comparing it directly with the now widely available Niger forgeries. Instead, a Foreign Office spokesman told *Private Eye* it is "not prepared to enter into debate about speculative media reports".

EXPORT GUARANTEES

Open for bribery

PAUL VOLCKER's report into corruption in the UN's Iraqi oil-for-food programme casts a rare light on the role of bribery in winning business for British companies abroad. In doing so it might explain why exporters are anxious to avoid strict anti-corruption conditions being placed on taxpayer-backed guarantees for their business.

Last year the then Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt (pictured) proposed a tough regime for companies seeking export guarantees, followed by a swift retreat in the face of heavy business lobbying and then a humiliating court defeat by campaigners forcing her to reopen the debate. Now, despite a commitment at the G8 summit in July to tackle bribery among exporters, compromise proposals just published still leave gaping loopholes through which exporters would be able to wangle taxpayer support while benefiting from corruption, largely by ensuring that dodgy deals are unlikely ever to be exposed.

The Volcker report exposes how a number of recent Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD) customers made illicit payments to Saddam's regime in return for lucrative business. Among the British companies cited that have also had exports underwritten by the taxpayer are the Weir engineering group, which paid kickbacks to the regime totalling $4.2m, and steel company Mabey & Johnson. The ECGD is also happy to give taxpayer backing to the UK operations of foreign companies and has recently issued guarantees to BNP Paribas, the western bank most heavily criticised in the report. BNP allowed $10m in oil "surcharges", ie bribes, to be paid anonymously by companies buying Iraqi oil to secret accounts in Jordan and Lebanon, often via Geneva.

NUCLEAR CONTRACTS

Wilson racket

FORMER Labour Energy Minister Brian Wilson's latest job with AMEC Nuclear shows that when it comes to carving up Britain's nuclear contracts, it's not what you know that counts but who.

AMEC is the only British company that poses serious competition to the big American firms bidding for atomic contracts in the UK. And as part of its drive to win business from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), it has hired the man who as a minister set up the authority in the first place.

Wilson did not have to apply to the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments for clearance for his new job because he had stopped being a minister in 2003 (the committee operates a two-year time limit). However, the prime minister blurred the boundaries of responsibility by making Wilson his personal "Special Representative for Trade and Reconstruction" in 2004, a role not covered by the advisory committee.

By acting as a special adviser and agent on industry and energy issues, Wilson would have appeared even more attractive to AMEC.

Industry sources suggest AMEC is wooing both the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) that runs the Dounreay nuclear site, and the British Nuclear Group. Its likely strategy will be to announce a "partnership" with the UKAEA to run Dounreay jointly.

Managers at Dounreay would love to privatise themselves into fat private salaried executive roles, and they see a "partnership" with AMEC as a stepping stone. AMEC, meanwhile, would gain from a lucrative contract at Dounreay while at the same time starting to build relationships with regulators. Nuclear contractors need site licences from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The HSE's nuclear staff know who they are dealing with at Dounreay, so AMEC would use these existing staff to face the regulators while its own managers took over other work.

Dounreay could be just a first step for AMEC towards securing the biggest jewel in the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's portfolio: the Sellafield contract, which will be tendered at a later date.

While this is all very cosy for AMEC and UKAEA managers, around 400 Dounreay workers are being made redundant in a re-run of the safety-endangering part-privatisation of the plant of the 1990s.

These backdoor routes to divvying up Britain's atomic contracts are unlikely to provide the safest or most cost-effective deals for taxpayers. As if to underline some of the possible problems, AMEC announced that it had also hired former BNFL chief executive Neville Chamberlain to work as a director alongside Wilson. AMEC was enthusiastic about Chamberlain's record at BNFL. This included commissioning the disastrous Thorp plant and setting up BNFL Inc to chase US clean-up contracts – work which seems to have saddled the ailing firm with some difficult American liabilities.

POLICE 5

Small change

ANSWERS (of a sort) have emerged to questions posed three years ago by *Private Eye* in the affair of police sergeant Gurpal Virdi, who was fitted up by his west London colleagues for allegedly sending race hate mail to fellow ethnic minority officers and was unfairly dismissed.

The *Eye* put a series of questions to those who had investigated the scandalous affair. Who were the real culprits? What action was to be taken against them and the three senior Met commanders who had found Virdi "guilty" on the flimsiest evidence (torn to shreds by his employment tribunal)? What action was to be taken against officers who authorised an unlawful "anti-terrorist"-style raid on Virdi's house? And what was to be done about senior officers who publicly (and wrongly) denounced Virdi in the press?

Seven years after the original events at Ealing police station, thanks to the Independent Police Complaints Commission we now know that… no one knows who carried out the race hate crime and no one is ever going to find out. Nor will anyone face disciplinary charges over anything.

According to the IPPC, its role now is simply to ensure that lessons have been learnt from the affair. But have they? There have been a string of similar high profile cases against the Met (cf Supt Ali Desai and PC Palbinder Singh, *Eyes passim*), and Virdi is about to bring an industrial tribunal case alleging victimisation relating to his treatment since returning to police work in 2002.

He may take comfort from the victory his colleague Palbinder Singh recently secured for black and Asian police officers over the raw deal they get from their trade union, the Police Federation. Mr Singh settled his case for discrimination against the Police Federation in return for a pledge from it to work with the National Black Police Association to survey all ethnic minority officers in order to improve its service for them.

PC Singh had faced a trumped up disciplinary charge in the Met (for which he received a cheque and an apology). But he had to pursue his case single-handedly after the Federation failed to represent him. He launched a test case against the Federation claiming it hadn't bothered to obtain the full facts about his case before refusing him help. By contrast he cited three different cases of white officers who had far weaker claims for discrimination – and indeed subsequently lost their cases – but were fully funded and supported by the Federation.

● ONE law for police and another for the rest of us? Kent police officer David Williamson, 33, was fined £1,000 at Maidstone Crown Court after admitting an insurance fraud (he'd claimed for a faulty computer which was working perfectly). But when sentencing him, Judge Lawson said: "Because this is an offence of dishonesty which has no bearing on his work as a police officer, I find that distinction lets me consider an alternative to custody." Worrying that a judge doesn't think policeman have to be honest...

CARDIFF THREE

Final insult

WHEN three innocent men were locked up for the 1988 murder of Lynette White, after one of the longest and most controversial murder trials, Yusef Abdullahi, Stephen Miller and Tony Paris, known as the Cardiff Three, were sentenced to life with the minimum "tariff" of between 18 and 21 years. Two other men, their cousins John and Ronnie Actie, served two years each on remand before they were acquitted at the end of the trial.

The Cardiff Three's wrongful imprisonment for the Valentine's Day murder triggered a huge campaign for justice which eventually led to the three men's acquittal in December 1992 – and the apprehension, 11 years later, of the real killer, Jeffery Gafoor, caught as a result of DNA evidence and innovative work by investigating officers.

Gafoor's conviction was the first time in British legal history that the real perpetrator of a crime had been caught and sentenced after a miscarriage of justice. Sentencing him to life, Mr Justice Royce said: "You allowed innocent men to go to prison for a crime that you knew you had committed."

However, it has now emerged that the judge has set a minimum tariff for Gafoor (the time he must serve before he can apply to be released on a life licence) at 12 years and eight months – nearly eight years less than the average tariff of the Cardiff Three. This is seen as a final insult to the three victims of a grave miscarriage of justice and to the family of Lynette White, who was stabbed more than 50 times by Gafoor.

Gafoor was apparently given credit for pleading guilty at the earliest opportunity and for assistance he had given to police investigating what had gone wrong in the original inquiry. Yet this was the man, who when police asked him for a sample for DNA testing, said, "I thought you had someone for that."

"I think it is outrageous that he got a lower tariff than us," said Tony Paris. "He was guilty and we were innocent. He let five men get charged for what he did and three get life sentences. And when you consider that at any time one or all of us could have committed suicide while he remained at liberty."

CIRCUS LICENSING

Tears of a clown

SMALL travelling circuses face crippling bills to comply with the new licensing laws that start later this month – as every time a travelling circus tent is erected it will be treated as if a new theatre has been built and the performers will have to pay for a new licence, costing around £500.

The circus community had expected to be granted an exemption from the law (akin to that for Morris dancers and other traditional performers) as had been mooted during the act's consultation process. But when the law was passed, there was no get-out clause for the big top. MP Peter Luff has introduced a ten-minute rule bill proposing an amendment to the law, which will get a second reading in December; but it has little to no chance of success without government backing. Meanwhile, the relevant sections of the Licensing Act 2003 come into force in late November.

John Appleyard, director of Circus Ricardo, told the *Eye* that the law actually means even more than £500 a week extra costs, as circus owners cannot risk being unable to perform if one licence is refused and they will therefore have to submit more than one application for each date. Licenses could cost them up to £30,000 per performing season. Circus Ricardo has just 10 employees and performs to around 14,000 people a year, taking around £100,000 in ticket sales. They also run school and community activities in the areas they visit.

One circus campaigner said it had been suggested by supporters of the law that circuses could recoup the losses by selling alcohol, since they would now have to apply for a licence anyway. Just the thing for a family show.

The *Eye* asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport how it expected small circuses to survive the change in the law. Answer came there none.

● *On sale now – "My Friend Footy" by Richard Ingrams. Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

WHISTLEBLOWING

A raspberry from the judges

DESPITE new laws that are supposed to offer whistleblowers better protection, those who reveal wrongdoing at their place of work are still losing their jobs and reputations and facing financial and emotional ruin.

Thanks to a Court of Appeal ruling last month, whistleblowers are about to become even more vulnerable in their jobs. Employers will only have to argue that an employee was "difficult", or conducted an aggressive defence in a disciplinary hearing, to be entitled to sack him or her.

The extraordinary judgment came in the case of Ian Perkin, the former finance director of St George's Healthcare NHS Trust who revealed how the hospital falsified its cancelled operations figures to obtain three-star status and better funding from the Government. He also disclosed the improper use of the trust's hospitality budget by chief executive Ian Hamilton (pictured).

Mr Perkin's case was one of a series of revelations which rocked the Tooting hospital and eventually led to two of the bosses, Catherine McLoughlin and chief executive Ian Hamilton, stepping down.

Mr Perkin is now 54 and treasurer of Surrey Police Authority. Last month the appeal judges accepted that his original disciplinary hearing was

no more than a kangaroo court: the chair of both the disciplinary panel and the trust, Catherine McLoughlin, had already expressed intent to get rid of him. The judges also heard how Mr Perkin was good at the job he had held for 12 years; had never received any complaint or warning; had been publicly commended by his bosses just two months earlier; had produced many colleagues to give evidence on his behalf – and, indeed, had made proper protected disclosures to expose financial irregularities. They also heard that the trust's moves to get rid of Mr Perkin came just two days after his whistle-blowing allegations had been made public.

Nevertheless the judges weren't swayed and ruled that Mr Perkin's difficult personality was 100 percent responsible for his sacking. So even if the disciplinary tribunal had been properly constituted and not pre-determined, Mr Perkin would still have been sacked. He could not be expected to work with bosses he had labelled as bullies and liars, the judges reasoned. Said Lord Justice Wall: "Mr Perkin was, of course, entitled to defend himself, but the manner of his defence, and in particular his attacks on the honesty, financial probity and integrity of his colleagues… opened the door in my judgment to the tribunal being able to find that any other disciplinary process would have ended with the same result."

Mr Perkin is to take his case to the House of Lords and whistleblowers everywhere will be hoping he wins.

Completely mental

WHILE Leeds Mental Health NHS Teaching Trust has been forced to lift its suspension of health and safety rep Paul Cockcroft (see *Eye* 1143) it has now suspended fire officer Chris Hindle.

Hindle was frustrated at senior managers' refusal to act on his advice in 2003 and his written report in 2004 that three new mental health units built under PFI were "not suitable for people with mental health problems." The trust then spent a five-figure sum commissioning three reports that simply confirmed Hindle's opinions. The then chief executive, Mike Atkins and deputy chief executive Nigel Fenny, both left prior to the release of the three damning reports.

Hindle then discovered that management had not passed on a speaking invitation from Leeds City Council scrutiny committee to him last month. After a disagreement with managers he was quickly suspended.

If by suspending Cockcroft and now Hindle the trust hoped to end the controversy it appears to have failed. Led by independent councillor Robert Finnigan, a coalition of Tories, Liberals and independents forced through a motion at the city council meeting on 1 November calling for a public inquiry into events at the new buildings. Three Labour councillors voted against, the rest abstained.

Highfield Residential Home

IN our story last issue about Bupa's heavy-handed treatment of Dee Sedgewick, who was complaining about the lack of care of her mother, Joan Gaddes, we inadvertently identified the wrong care home. We said Mrs Gaddes was a resident of Highfield, Bedford, when she was a resident at Highfield in Halesworth, Suffolk. We apologise for the confusion.

MMR

The lessons of Cochrane

THE latest review on MMR safety and efficacy by the Cochrane Collaboration, the highly respected international group which assesses healthcare evidence, found that "exposure to MMR was unlikely to be associated with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis or autism." It also concluded that "the design and reporting of safety outcomes in MMR vaccine studies, both pre and post-marketing are largely inadequate."

As the report said: "We found only limited evidence of safety of the MMR compared to [single vaccines]" and "we could not find studies assessing the effectiveness of the MMR that fulfilled our criteria."

Three years ago the Cochrane Collaboration carried out a similar far-reaching review. Its main findings were virtually identical. "Exposure to MMR was unlikely to be associated with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis or autism. The design and reporting of safety outcomes in MMR vaccine studies, both pre and post marketing are largely inadequate."

In 2002 newspapers carried headlines saying "most MMR studies are meaningless" and recorded calls by Dr Tom Jefferson, one of the authors of the 2002 Cochrane Collaboration, for better research into the long term effects of the triple jab, and his criticisms of the Government and health officials for "refusing to listen to people's anxieties and unwillingness to evaluate evidence critically".

The *Eye*, which had previously argued that evidence being cited by the Government to discredit Andrew Wakefield was flawed and did not answer the questions Wakefield had raised, also reported Jefferson's conclusion that some of that research was "lousy".

So if the findings were exactly the same, what was so different in the second paper that caused the change in reporting? An added synopsis to the paper said there was "no credible" evidence supporting a link with autism and gut disease. And a press release – on which busy reporters often rely – said there was no credible link to *any* long-term disability, including Crohn's and autism, that lack of confidence has caused great damage to public health and that people arguing for or against any therapy need to make sure that this is based on carefully collected evidence, and not just biased opinion, speculation or suspicion.

But in the intervening three years has there been a mountain of new and better research of the type that had been demanded by Cochrane to answer the controversy in 2002? The answer from its own paper is: no.

In 2002 the Cochrane authors found only 22 eligible studies out of 3,500, having to disregard the rest because of possible error or bias. In the latest review, they found 31 out of some 5,000. Of the nine new papers, only five were looking at autism – and even the two best of those were at some small risk of bias.

For the record the *Eye* did not enter the debate in 1998 when the Royal Free paper, which triggered the whole debate, was published. The *Eye*'s interest changed in 2001 when Professor John O'Leary, a leading pathologist, had then found measles virus persisting in the guts of 24 out of 25 of Wakefield's autistic patients and only one of his developmentally normal "control" children. That, coupled with a unique pattern of bowel disease and inflammation, which Wakefield's 1998 paper did identify, was at the heart of the legal action being mounted by more than 2,000 families and seemed to us to justify further investigation. Until those investigations were complete, we said that a responsible government should make single vaccines available for any parents who were anxious.

Since then Wakefield has been completely vilified, the legal action from the families stalled by the withdrawal of funding, and Wakefield's detractors have cast their net wider to blame anyone who raised questions for being "anti-vaccine" and responsible should there be an outbreak of measles.

Again, for the record, the conclusion in our special report in 2002, *MMR The story so far*, said: "No one is arguing against vaccination. No one wants to see a return of measles, the dangers of which no one underestimates." And we called for a huge international scientific and medical collaboration to nail the debate quickly and once and for all.

But no proper explanation of that discovery of measles virus, in some cases later identified as vaccine strain and also later found in the spinal fluid and brain in a small number of patients, has ever been forthcoming. The argument was that it had not been replicated or there was some fault in the procedure.

As *Eye* readers will know, in the US health chiefs are now funding the kind of rigorous, case-controlled study that Cochrane has long called for. Ian Lipkin, Professor of Neurology at Colombia University and a world authority on the role of genetic, immune and infection factors in brain disease, is leading a study to see if indeed measles virus persists, and at what level, in the guts of children with regressive autism, compared to a group of children, matched by age, sex and other factors, without developmental disorder. It will also see whether any persisting virus is vaccine strain. Even if it does confirm the O'Leary findings, it will not prove any causation by the MMR jab; but it will confirm an association between persistent measles virus at the site of inflammation in the gut and the combined diagnosis of regressive autism and gut disease – and therefore highlight the need for more investigation into these children's condition.

Since reporting that in 2004, the *Eye* has learned of two other replication studies in the US. Because of difficulties in finding matched controls, the studies are taking longer than initially anticipated. If they find that measles persists in both "normal" and autistic children, then that would tend to rule out a link with autism, but would still raise questions about the virus role in any gut disorder.

If the studies do not find measles, that would settle the controversy once and for all and we will be the first to say so.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

FORMER Tory Chancellor Ken Clarke duly fought off the bid to unseat him from the board of Savoy Asset Management at last week's shareholders' meeting with the kind of voting support that Saddam Hussein or any dictator would have been proud.

More than 95 percent of the shares held by clients of SAM subsidiary Savoy Investment Management (SIM) look to have voted for Clarke – despite the absence of any dividend since 2002, regular losses until last year and a continued poor stock market performance. Perhaps only 2,000 shares out of up to 3.7 million believed to be held by some 190 SIM clients voted against the chairman. Doubtless SIM polled all its clients and did not exercise any of those votes in favour of Clarke using their discretionary powers, so the voting was free and fair.

Though unsurprising, the result left still unanswered by the SAM board just who are these loyal private clients who make up the bulk of the so-supportive if not supine shareholders – and why have they allowed the directors to enrich themselves with ever bigger salaries while the company under-performed? Since the meeting the shares have continued to slide down to 153p compared to a recent peak of 181p.

"Let's take a look at how much your endowment will yield when it matures..."

One answer lies in a crucial block of 10 percent of SAM shares which are understood to be held through nominees for several trusts located in secrecy-loving Liechtenstein and managed by the appropriately named Bryan Jeeves, the colourful former British honorary consul based in Schaan.

SAM announced that two thirds of those voting had rejected the proposal to sack Clarke, initiated by the company's largest shareholder, the Kuwaiti-based Global Investment House. This was not unexpected as the SAM board has admitted that more than 50 percent of the capital is "working as a concert party" and has done so since flotation in 1997. This fact had not been made public. The Liechtenstein trusts would appear to be part of that undisclosed concert party.

The Kuwaitis polled around 34 percent so were backed by shareholders holding around 9 percent of the company. These included German activist investor Sven Lorenz, who has acquired a 1 percent stake. Lorenz has a large holding in German asset manager PEH Wertpapier. He turned up with no fewer than 88 questions for the board not to answer. Fellow value investor Julian Treger holds a further 3 percent, but these shares were not voted, seemingly for technical reasons, although Treger is said to be increasingly critical of the SAM management. So the battle for control of SAM may not be over yet.

Which makes the ownership and intentions of the Liechtenstein trusts all the more significant. They all voted in support of Clarke and so ensured the Kuwaiti move was defeated. Global House holds 25.5 percent, but that is matched by the shares held by the majority of the SAM directors and two major shareholders – former director Tom Tutton and the family of former director Brian Banks.

The balance of power was held by the Liechtenstein trusts and other shares mustered by Savoy Investment Management which are mainly held through the Pershing Keen Nominees' TUT account. That nominee holding, which also includes shares held for some directors, has grown inexorably since the flotation from just under 2m shares to now 3,243,000 or around 34 percent of the company.

So who is behind the Liechtenstein trusts? Jeeves, the keeper of their secrets, has lived in Liechtenstein since 1962 and is a prominent provider of tax haven services, not just amid the snowy Alps but also in the warmer Caribbean haven of St Vincent. Jeeves is close to the Liechtenstein royal family. He is also a member of the Carlton Club where SAM does much of its business. Bryan Jeeves is also no stranger to SAM founders Christopher Saunders, the chief executive, and Tom Tutton.

Just who hides behind the Liechtenstein trusts is uncertain; nor is it clear what if any connection there may be between the beneficial ownership of the several trusts. None of the holdings exceeds the 3 percent mark which requires disclosure. However, it seems that SAM has not felt the need to press Jeeves to disclose the ultimate beneficial owners. One assumption could be therefore that SAM may have a some idea who owns these shares. Which, if so, may explain why these shareholders were happy to vote in support of a board which has consistently under-performed other than for its own benefit.

Despite his royal connections and an OBE in 1993 for services rendered, the estimable Jeeves is no stranger to controversy. Five years ago a St Vincent company (Casterbridge Properties) represented by the Jeeves Group was named in a £7m timeshare scam closed down by the Department of Timidity and Inaction involving properties in Kent and Northern Cyprus linked to Hever Worldwide Properties and brothers Ron and John Popely. Jeeves reportedly claimed he could not provide evidence to the DTI because of client confidentiality.

More recently, in September Jeeves, together with son Alexander and the Jeeves Group were sued in the United States over the collapse of a suspected Ponzi circular money scheme centred on loans against shares provided by Derivium Capital. Derivium made loans of around $1bn in return for shares handed over as security. After a minimum three years, if the shares went up, the loan was repaid plus interest and the borrowers kept the profit; if the shares went down, they walked away. The loan was up to 90 percent of the share value. Any gains were said to be tax free.

All too good to last or be true. Derivium ceased business last May with outstanding loans of $700m out of total loans of $900m. Up to $80m may be missing. Several judgments have been obtained by US investors seeking return of their shares. There are also a number of civil actions pending. Whether the security is still there remains in doubt. The shares could have been sold to make the loans.

And where did Derivium obtain its $1bn, if not from selling the shares? Supposedly from Manx company Bancroft Ventures whose shares were held as trustees by a St Vincent company established by the Jeeves Group. Bancroft has moved to Cyprus and its directors are in Beirut. Jeeves denies any knowledge of or involvement in any fraud.

It would no doubt be asking too much of the Fundamentally Supine Authority to insist that the Liechtenstein mystery be solved and Bryan Jeeves and his friends at SAM be required to disclose not just who are the beneficial owners of that 10 percent but also on what basis SIM votes the shares held by its clients in the cosy concert party that effectively controls a public, listed company.

THE Isle of Man tax haven also has some questions to answer following the ruling by the Privy Council last month which decided that Peter Henwood, whose family controls local Jeeves Group company administration rival OCRA, had dishonestly assisted in the theft of some £6.8m of Barlow Clowes investors' money by fraudster Peter Clowes and an associate.

The Privy Council overturned a Manx Appeal Court verdict which had itself overruled the original finding against Henwood by the Deemster, the local high court judge. Henwood must now pay more than £9.3m to the liquidators of Barlow Clowes International which collapsed in 1988. Nobody can be accused here of a rush to judgment!

Henwood ran International Trust Corporation before OCRA which has offices in London as well as the Isle of Man. Henwood says he has no public connection with OCRA which is owned via a company in the Seychelles by his wife. It is understood that was a condition insisted upon by

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Party Poker's successful game of bluff

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...Outside shareholders' losses since

Money raised by insiders in July's float...

–£215m

the Manx authorities. Not surprising given the criticisms made of Henwood over Barlow Clowes. After all, Henwood could hardly pass a "fit and proper" test even in the Isle of Man.

However, Henwood's influence has never been far away, according to former OCRA insiders who suggest that had the Privy Council ruling gone the other way, he would have been pressing to become directly involved. This now seems somewhat unlikely given the withering judgment delivered by Lord Hoffman.

Henwood, he pointed out, had worked closely with Clowes and had even considered selling ITC to Clowes and his associate, Guy Cramer. "Henwood consciously decided not to make inquiries because he preferred in his own interest not to run the risk of discovering the truth… such a state of mind is dishonest," Hoffman declared.

Furthermore, at the original trial the judge had held that Henwood had lied when giving evidence for six days to cover up what he knew. "Henwood's evidence, which the judge found to be untruthful, was that he knew nothing and had no reason to suspect anything." Henwood had made a "deliberate and dishonest decision" not to seek any explanation for the payments from client funds made on behalf of Clowes and Cramer. Clowes was jailed but Cramer was acquitted. The British taxpayer effectively picked up the £150m tab for compensating the Barlow Clowes victims because of the failures of the DTI to stop the fraud.

Viewers of BBC World will regularly see advertisements for OCRA's services. The Manx authorities would do well to monitor just how hands-off Henwood is in the company's management behind the family trust arrangements, especially given the continued presence of Henwood loyalists who go back to the Barlow Clowes period.

NAPOLEON judged his generals by whether they were lucky. Accountants Grant Thornton certainly fail that test.

First Grant Thornton in Italy failed to detect that £2.8bn in a Parmalat account at Bank of America did not exist and that the documentation it accepted was fabricated. This was the cornerstone of the biggest financial fantasy perpetrated for years by the directors of the Italian food giant.

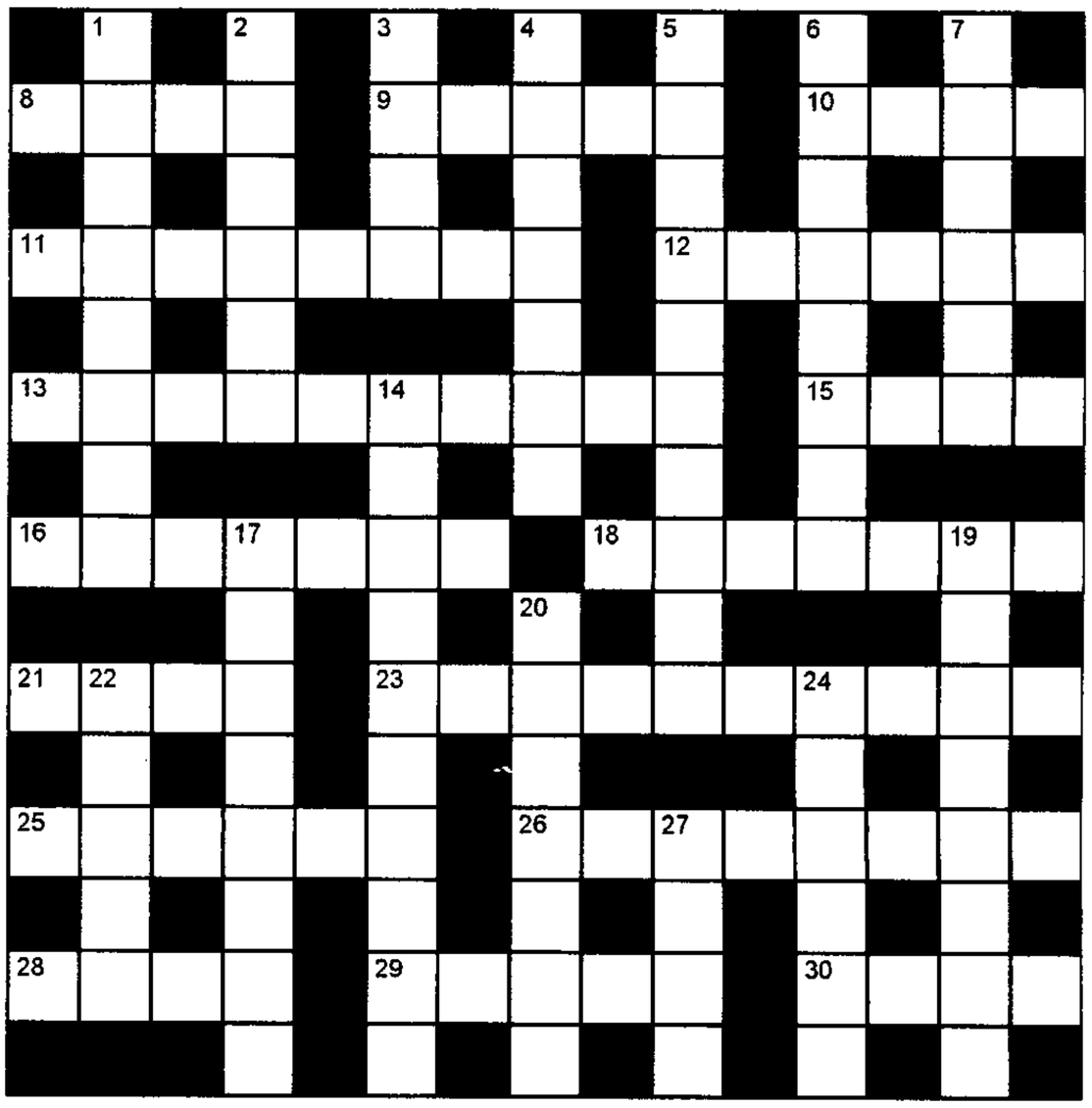
Now it emerges that for three years Grant Thornton in the US failed to spot that Refco chief executive Philip Bennett was carrying out regular back-to-back loan transactions designed to "window dress" out of existence $430m he owed the brokerage group to cover bad debts from clients. Matching loans with a hedge fund were reversed immediately after any audit. This simple trick was immediately found by a new internal accountant hired to work on the numbers for the first quarter after Refco floated in August!

As with Parmalat and its founder Calisto Tanzi, Grant Thornton claims it was also victim of a determined deception by Bennett. But given that Refco admitted in its prospectus that it had internal financial control problems, how hard were Grant Thornton looking or were they again, like at Parmalat, blinded by the fees from a big client? No contest.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 300

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 18 November 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

8 Incompetent US agents have sod all but this parting remark (4)
9 Alternative leader of Labour? Gordon's mostly lacking the fibre (5)
10 Labour to get organ (*Sun*, finally?) (4)
11 People who want unknown, dodgy ways to make a living (8)
12 What the rucked-up carpet had to be after soldiers shagged? (6)
13 Court rip off taking place, as you'd find in a rotten borough? (10)
15 Finished removing top from someone you're shagging? (4)
16 Dyke wants Beeb's head to intervene in Selina broadcast (7)
18 Old fashioned you accepting hand job (wife having left) – I'm grateful in a quaint way (7)
21 One who sacrificed himself, pointlessly, for sex (4)
23 He'd try, dead pissed, to be wet no more (10)
25 A bit like a pirate, having pee before capsizing yacht? (6)
26 Joker, performing, pissed on sleeper (5-3)
28 Dam Scotland Yard's arse over tip (4)
29 Indian dish sustains one in hurricane (5)
30 Cunning liar ditches Brenda (4)

DOWN

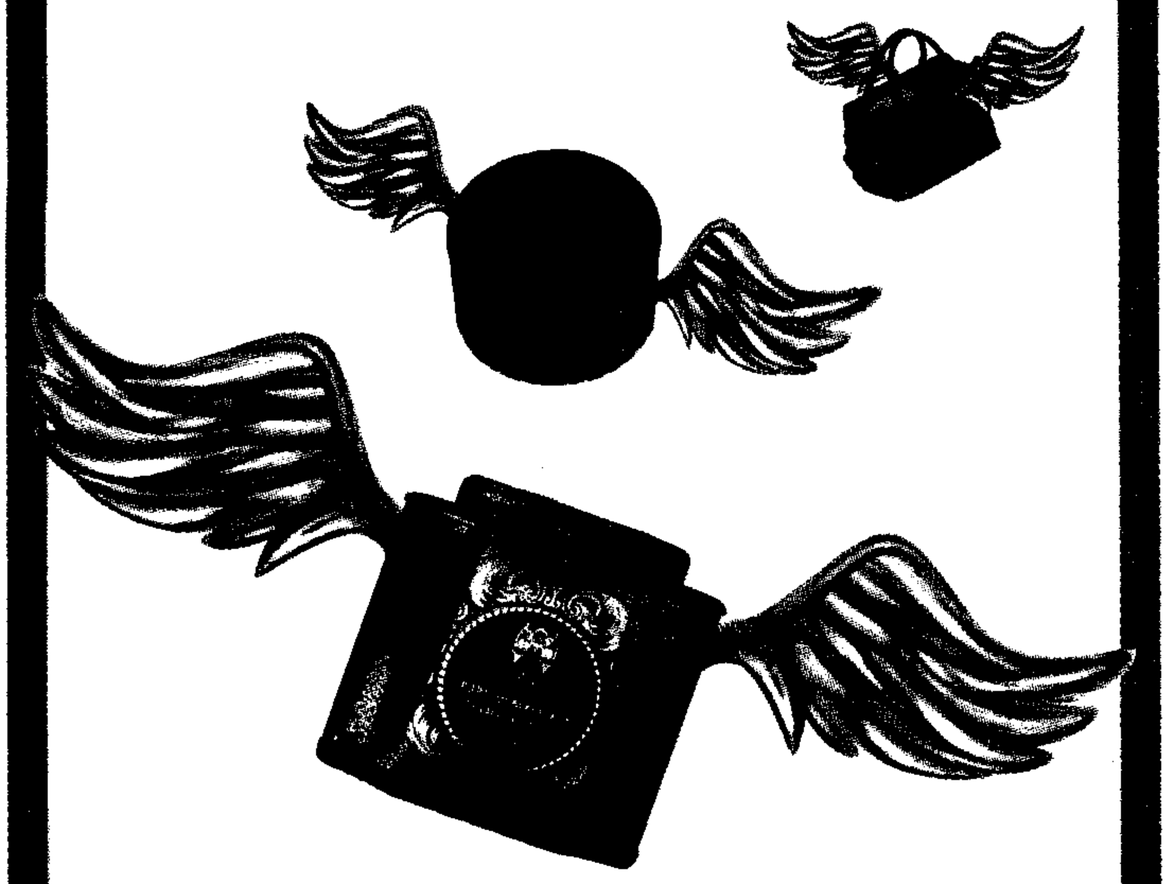
1 He quits group sex when Cyclops enters – boring (8)
2 Bush to Blair: "Surrender, so war ends? That's awful!" (6)
3 Straw's heart set on an honour and stately attire (4)
4 Nigel, a stickler, able to endure a stretch inside (7)
5 Distorting the creed with nation's extremes: descriptive of, say, Ian Paisley's position (10)
6 The devil's own erection incorporating fancy bell (4-4)
7 Sulphur content of piss of Bruno (6)
14 Clary: "I'm up Sid's end – wild party!" ... (5,5)
17 ... onwards and upwards from this point for mean gay? (4,4)
19 Organ placed by disrespectful female at one end of microscope (8)
20 Who's bi? Dicky, at the last luvvies' thing (7)
22 Luvvies' award back to front and behind (5)
24 Labour's number two gets in to abolish periodical (6)
27 Austrian town's pisspoor rag 'annexing' *Zeitung*'s leader (4)

Crossword 299 winner: STU HARRIS

ACROSS: 1/15 A kick in the goolies 5 Fjords 9 Oslo 10 Off the wall 12 Risky 13 Albinoni 14 Flea 17 The Kremlin 19 Gasp 21 Smash hit 24 Privy purse 25 Mutt 26 Modify 27 Snorter.

DOWN: 2 Kestrel 3 Cross-talk 4 Irony 6 John Brown 7 Rowan 8 Silence 11 Flagellator 15/23A The ship of state 16 Leg warmer 18 Humdrum 20 Sceptre 22 Saved 23 Stern.

HUSBAND



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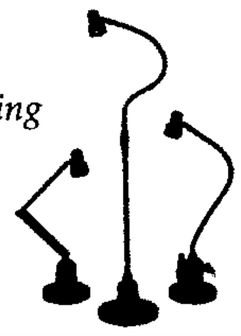

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OM SAI RAM

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A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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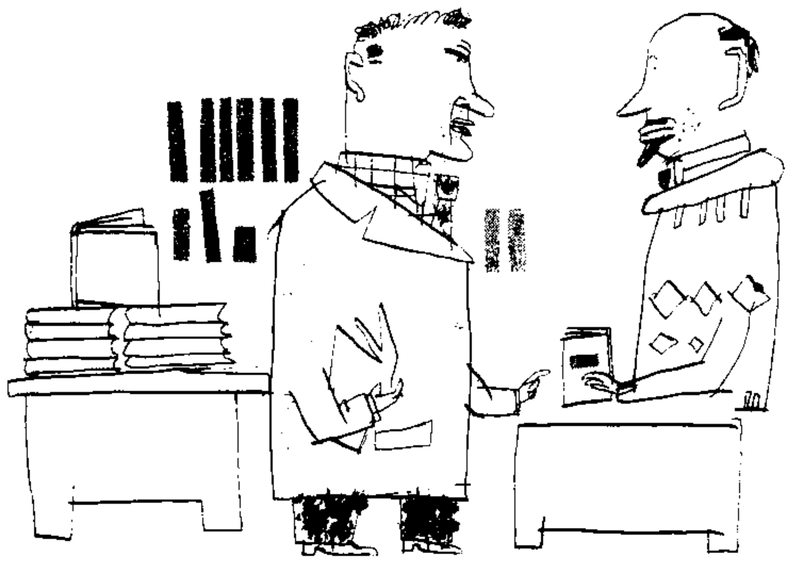

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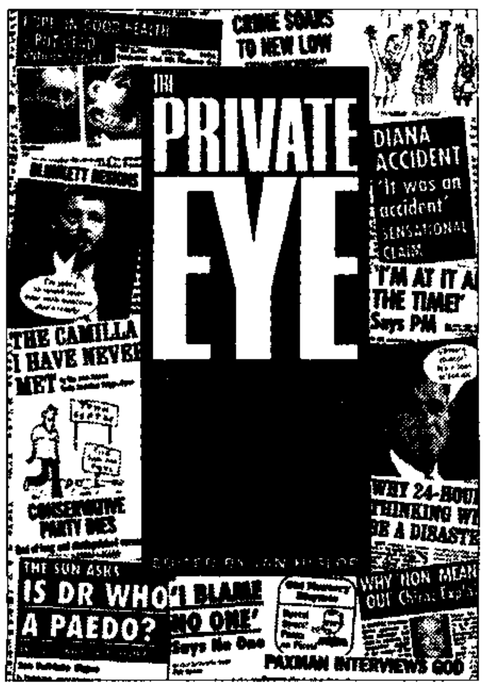
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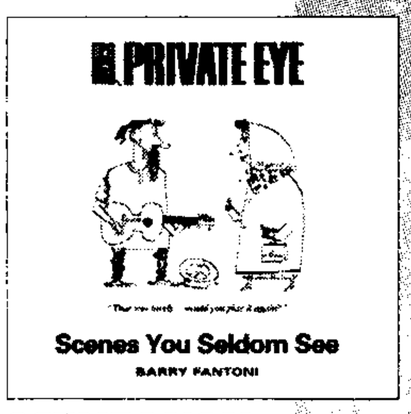

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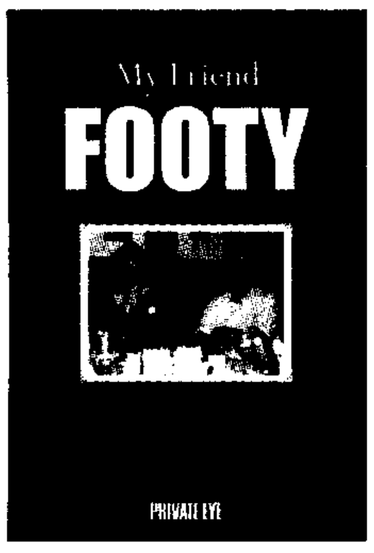

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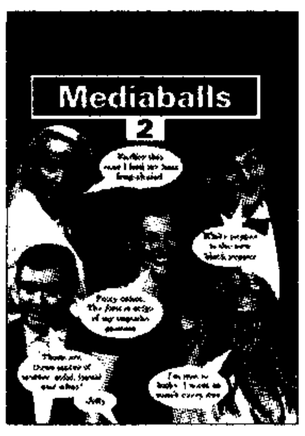

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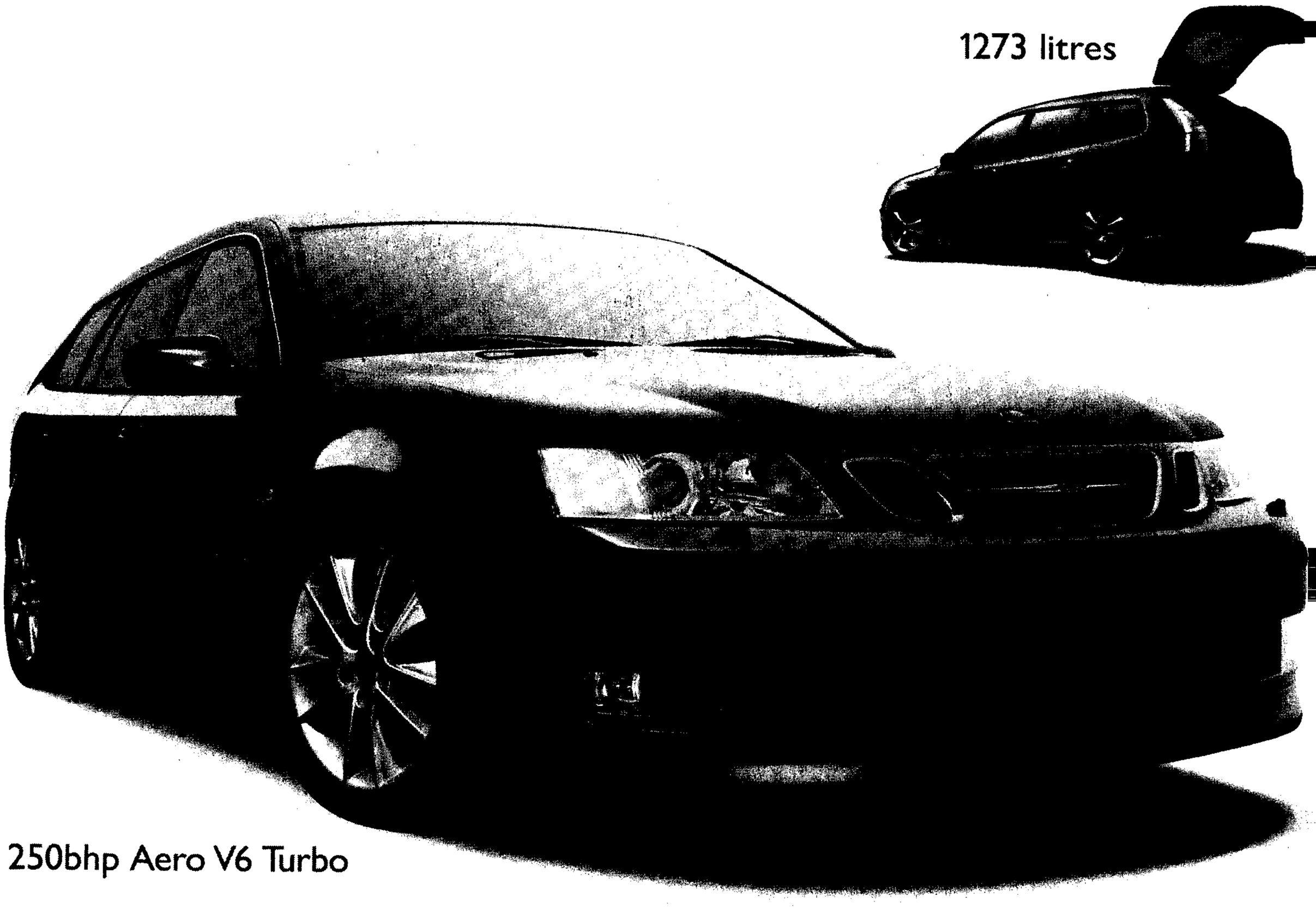

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